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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

STYLE, REVERENCE, AND "DISCOVERY" IN THE POEMS OF GREVILLE, HERBERT, AND DONNE

BY

GERALD WANDIO

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1991

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ABSTRACT

The greatest style of Fulke Greville, George Herbert, and John Donne is one in which the greatest subject available to the poet--the relationship of the human being to the infinite, and specifically the relationship of the human soul to God--can be treated with reverence and with a humility that allows the poet to abase his sinfulness without abasing the intellect or the poetic talent that allows him to understand and communicate his sense of sinfulness. The poems in which this style appears in its highest achievement are themselves not simply expressions or communications of that understanding, but actual means through which the poet understands and feels; they are "forms of discovery" for the poet and for the reader who comprehends the poems in their complex entireties. This style is one that differs greatly from poet to poet, but which is in its essentials similar: it is a refinement of the best features of the plain and sweet styles of the sixteenth century, as perfected by Gascoigne and Ralegh on the one hand and Sidney on the other.

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Chapter I

Style, Reverence, and "Discovery"

> Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator and plead the merits of his Redeemer is already in a higher state than poetry can confer. (291)

Dr. Johnson was wrong. Contemplative piety can be poetical, and can in fact constitute the highest form of poetry, as Fulke Greville, George Herbert, and John Donne prove by example in a few poems each. What Johnson doesn't acknowledge here is that contemplating, imploring, and pleading are all acts that can be performed only in language, and that are best performed in "elevated" language--poetry. What is at issue, I believe, is the style of the language in which these acts are performed. If the style is appropriate to the subject and the occasion, the intercourse between God and the soul may be not only expressed but actually created in great poetry.

But is there one style that is most appropriate to the subject so well named by Johnson? The poets I'm interested in were writing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and they had immediately available to them two

styles. The one, exemplified by Gascoigne and Ralegh, we usually call the moral or the plain style; the other, most famously practised by Spenser and perfected by Sidney, we can call the golden, ornamental, or sweet style. Yvor Winters' rewriting of the history of the Renaissance short poem has made these terms widely known, and even those who prefer more tendentious terms than "plain" and "sweet" maintain the distinction--notably C.S. Lewis, whose opinion about the styles and their practitioners is clear from his calling the styles "Golden" and "Drab." (Surely no one turning to Lewis' chapter entitled "Drab Age Verse" truly expects to be delighted with the poetry discussed there--despite Lewis' protest that his choice of names is neither "eulogistic" nor "dyslogistic" [64].) The two styles usually have very different purposes and effects--very broadly speaking, the plain to teach and the sweet to delight--though either style can perform either function or both. While Greville, Herbert, and Donne occasionally used one style or the other, most of the work of each poet is written in a style that borrows some of the features of the plain and some of the sweet; and while this hybrid style is unique to each poet--one can hardly mistake one of Donne's poems or one of Herbert's for a Greville poem--at its best its affinities are greater than its differences. And at its best the style of each poet enables him to write great religious poetry.

My interest is in style as a medium through which a poet

may both discover and communicate his understanding of an experience--specifically, the experience of his soul's relationship to God--and in the ability of that style to embody the quality most crucial to the successful discovery and communication of that experience: reverence. I am concerned, not with precise description and categorization of a specific style, but with exemplifying that style in the great religious poems of Greville, Herbert, and Donne. In my discussion of each poet, I will indicate as well the way in which that poet's greatest style was developed; how it differs from his earlier or inferior styles; and whether the poet's critical reception appreciates or deprecates the style I consider each poet's finest. I mean not to set up a standard of "reverence" or "discovery" against which each poem will be measured (although the standards relevant to my judgements arise largely from a comparison of the three poets); rather, I believe with George Whalley that "if we hold sensitive and forthright commerce with poems, the poems themselves become instruments of inquiry" (207). Each poem tells us how it must be read; once the poem is understood on its own terms, it may be compared to the achievements of other poets to see just what <u>can</u> be done in a similar case. Especially when talking about religious poetry, however, which will necessarily be intensely private even as it employs the public medium of language to communicate, we must respect each poet's epiphanies and their expressions; while this rules out neither

comparison nor judgement, it does remind us that our attitude toward great poetry must itself partake of a degree of reverence.

Behind the choice of styles made by each of my three poets stands one predominant influence: the poetry of Sir Philip Sidney. He was Greville's closest friend, a relative to Herbert, and a source for Donne, and his theory and practice inform the work of these poets and many others contemporary and subsequent. It was Sidney who brought the sixteenth-century sweet style to its perfection in many of the poems in Astrophil and Stella, Certain Sonnets, and the Arcadia, and many of those poems in turn provide models for Greville, Herbert, and Donne. It is thus not only the greatness of the religious poetry of these three poets that leads me to discuss them together; it is also their common indebtedness to Sidney that links them. In my chapter on Greville I give examples of poems that are clearly variations on Sidney's; it has long been known that in their youth the two poets (probably along with Sir Edward Dyer) wrote together on identical subjects. I show as well how Herbert in "Jordan (I)," as in "Jordan (II)," clearly depends on a poem of Sidney's as a model, and that Herbert's style and procedure in many other poems owe a great deal to Sidney. And I suggest that Donne begins his poetic career as a Petrarchan poet very much in the manner of Sidney (assimilating as well Sidney's

anti-Petrarchan tendencies), and that the techniques of the sweet style that he learned from Sidney remain with him through his great religious poems as well.

Sidney himself wrote no poems (aside from his generally unexceptional translations of the Psalms) that I would want to call "religious"; the last two of his Certain Sonnets, "Thou blind man's marke" and "Leave me o Love," might be described as Christian renunciation poems (and both are, I think, among his best poems), but neither deals with "the intercourse between God and the human soul" as so many of Greville's, Donne's, and Herbert's poems do. So it is very strictly as a stylistic precursor that Sidney interests me in connection with my three poets. And in that capacity, as I will demonstrate throughout, he is ubiquitous.

While my main concern in this study is with the development of a style appropriate to poetry of the most serious kind, each chapter has an emphasis slightly different from its fellows. In my chapter on Greville, whose best poems I judge to be the most deeply reverent and most nearly perfect of their kind, I emphasize Greville's attempts to develop (and his eventual success in developing) a style that allows him to discover, through the very act of writing poetry, the conditions for his salvation and, finally, the fact of his salvation, and a style that both creates and conveys the profound and complex emotions that must accompany such a

discovery. In the disagreement with Dr. Johnson with which I began this chapter, I emphasized the inseparability of language from contemplation, and I believe that Greville understood this indissoluble link and that his poems embody that understanding. When at the end of Caelica XCIX--the poem in and through which Greville comprehends the fact of his personal salvation--he says of Christ "Thus hath his death rais'd up this soul of mine," that "Thus" is no facile assumption: it is the precision of Greville's style as it enacts and expresses his understanding of Christ's sacrifice that is an actual condition of his salvation. And it is only through this poem and the poems on the same subject that precede it that Greville is able to come to this understanding; his great religious poems are the poet's forms of discovery.

My discussion of Herbert proceeds from the same assumptions about style and "discovery," but makes another claim as well: in most of the poems in The Temple, including those for which he is most often praised, Herbert seems to be not discovering but teaching--or, more bluntly, preaching. "A verse may find him who a sermon flies, / And turn delight into a sacrifice," he says only a few lines into the first poem in his book, and most of his poems seem dedicated to finding reluctant parishioners and teaching them while seeming not to be doing so. Only in those few poems in which Herbert is working out for himself the difficult problem of his soul's

relationship to God, or--as is the case in the remarkable "Church-monuments"--the relationship of his soul to the inexorable fact of human mortality, is his greatest style put to use; and in those few poems his achievement is almost equal to Greville's.

When I turn to Donne, I emphasize the difficulty he has both in his religious and in his love poetry in effacing himself, in removing his own personality and especially his poetic brilliance from the centre of attention. While we can understand how a man of Donne's genius might find himself his most interesting subject, we must object when most of his love poems take a much greater interest in the lover than in his beloved; and we must object even more strenuously to the religious poetry that puts God in a position of secondary importance, with the poet's own ingenuity playing the lead in the psychomachia each poem creates. This egotistical characteristic of Donne's poetry, however, also makes us appreciate more fully those few poems in which the poet does efface himself, does realize that his subject--God--must transcend all other concerns. In those few cases in which Donne's style is put fully to the service of his intelligence and kept in check by his rarely seen humility, Donne demonstrates his understanding of his own sinfulness and of his absolute reliance on God, and does so in poems that not only communicate but actually enact the poet's attainment of salvation.

If this claim--that it is in the actual details of style that the truly reverent religious poet's salvation resides -- seems extreme, I can only repeat my original point: we understand salvation, as we understand all things, through language; all language, when it is consciously arranged, must have a style; and style, among other functions, both constitutes and communicates our understanding of our subject. When that subject is the greatest--the relationship of the human soul to God--it is in the details of style or nowhere that the subject can be comprehended. Greville, Herbert, and Donne knew this: and that knowledge is in their great poems.

Chapter II

The Styles of Greville's Caelica

A group of poems towards the end of Fulke Greville's Caelica illustrates better than any of his earlier poems Greville's precision of thought and expression and his constant refining of his style and, consequently, the improvement of his understanding of the important matters he deals with--in these poems, his soul's relationship to God.[1] The poems I have in mind are Caelica XCVII, XCVIII, XCIX, and CIX, which form a series with the following related themes: Although we pray to and profess to believe in God, we spend most of our time enjoying thoughts of sin and sinful things, and our hypocrisy makes us as bad as the Jews who crucify [disbelieve in] Christ; I understand my sins and that I deserve the hell I'm in, and if I could learn to be sorry for my sins rather than for the pains they cause me, God would deliver me; contemplating my sins and the profundity of my wickedness, I realize that Christ died for all sinners and will raise up my own soul with His death; the world has

utterly lost sight of God, and it would thus be best for Jesus to return now and end sin forever. I have said that these poems illustrate Greville's precision, because, more than my statements of theme demonstrate, in the poems Greville is working toward a solution of one great problem--how can man, who is sinful both by nature and by inclination, dare to hope for salvation, and how can he know if he has attained it?--and uses many of the same terms, sometimes in the same grammatical constructions: eternal, almighty, infinite, hell, sin, mercy, degeneration, desolation, sprites, infernal, ugly, iniquity, power, confounded, depth, absence, glory, mirror of transgression, desperation, truth, impression. He reuses these terms in different poems because they are the precise words he needs, and because in each poem he can invest them with slightly different meanings, meanings which accumulate, so that by the last poem of the sequence, for example, his calling God a "mirrour of transgression" is not a startling metaphor but an exact expression of Greville's understanding, as refined by his use of the phrase in several previous poems, of how God's infinite goodness can "reflect" man's depravity back on him. The poems themselves thus become "forms of discovery,"[2] media through which the poet not only communicates his understanding of his subject, but actually arrives at that understanding through the details of the poems' style.

In the first of the poems I have mentioned, Greville addresses God as "Eternall Truth, almighty, infinite." The humility of this line resonates through this poem and the other three and through all the other poems to or about God in Caelica, and is a keynote as well of Greville's style: never concerned, or at least never exclusively concerned, with displaying his own skill, he tries at all times to define ever more precisely his subject and his understanding of it, and in so doing develops a style capable of handling the most serious subjects with a grace that comes from accuracy. His profound belief in man's absolute depravity, a belief that finds its fullest expression in these four poems, largely determined both his subjects and his styles. Even in the earlier poems in the sequence, those addressed to Myra, Cynthia, Caelica, or an unnamed mistress, Greville almost always finds himself inferior to the woman--who is herself usually portrayed as depraved in her unfaithfulness, which comparison allows Greville to abase himself all the more completely. As he says in A Letter to an Honourable Lady, "We may therefore as well seeke fishe upon the mountaines, trees in the sea; as peace in fleshe" (158); only in a truly humble relationship with God (the kind he achieves in his late poems, and the kind that Donne, for all his efforts, is seldom able to achieve) is there true peace. And that truly humble relationship can be achieved only by the soul's sincere repentance, and by its recognition of its absolute dependence

on God's mercy: "If from this depth of sinne . . . / . . . / I could implore his mercy, who can saue, / And for my sinnes, not paines of sinne, be sorry, / . . . / . . . thou wouldst deliver me" (XCVIII). I would like to consider in some detail Greville's style as it is exhibited in these four poems, because these are his best poems, and it is in them that the style that he has been working out through Caelica is perfected. After I have described that style in its highest achievement, I will demonstrate its development by examining a number of the earlier poems in the sequence.

Here then is XCVII:

> Eternall Truth, almighty, infinite,
> Onely exiled from mans fleshly heart,
> Where ignorance and disobedience fight,
> In hell and sinne, which shall have greatest part:
> When thy sweet mercy opens forth the light,
> Of Grace which giueth eyes vnto the blind,
> And with the Law euen plowest vp our sprite
> To faith, wherein flesh may salvation finde;
> Thou bidst us pray, and wee doe pray to thee,
> But as to power and God without us plac'd,
> Thinking a wish may weare out vanity,
> Or habits be by miracles defac'd.
> One thought to God wee giue, the rest to sinne,
> Quickely unbent is all desire of good,
> True words passe out, but haue no being within,
> Wee pray to Christ, yet helpe to shed his blood;
> For while wee say Believe, and feele it not,
> Promise amends, and yet despaire in it,
> Hear Sodom iudg'd, and go not out with Lot,
> Make Law and Gospell riddles of the wit:
> We with the Iews euen Christ still crucifie,
> As not yet come to our impiety.

The opposition of God's infiniteness with His exile "onely" "from mans fleshly heart" immediately introduces the subject of these four poems: man's depravity. The opposition is not contradictory, for, as Milton will make plain, man's heart is

the one place into which God will not force an entrance; for Him to do so would be to eliminate man's free will and to make obedience a matter of compulsion rather than choice.[3] So the human heart really is the only place in the universe from which God can be, by choice, excluded. Greville's "man" here is general, as it is in CIX: his point is that humans, naturally depraved, cannot but turn from God, and that God alone (as the next poem makes clear) can choose despite this rejection of Him to rescue them. The claim of this poem, which is the bleakest of the four in its opinion of mankind, is that <u>even</u> "When [God's] sweet mercy" works within us, "One thought to God wee giue, the rest to sinne, / . . . / [and] We with the <u>Iews</u> euen <u>Christ</u> still crucifie." The "still" is used as Herrick uses it in "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" ("Old Time is still a-flying" and "The worse, and worst times / Still succeed the former") and as Donne uses it in "Hymn to God the Father" to mean "constantly" or "habitually," suggesting not only that men have done this even up to Greville's time, but that they always will. And what they do is no less than to sacrifice Christ over and over again to their own pleasure, or to their own false gods. This point is made in almost the same words in the last poem in <u>Caelica</u>, where Christ is "still crucifi'd for doing well"; here the "still" has even greater force, because in that last poem Greville surveys the state of the world and calls for the Last Judgement to put an end to the perpetuity of sin signified by

"still."

What is the style that can deal with such a subject in such a way? The main characteristics of Greville's style are these: concision, precision, and the creation through accuracy of grace. By concision I mean that Greville is tactful: he knows how to say exactly the right amount about a subject, and how to say it with no wasted words. And in Greville concision necessitates linguistic and stylistic precision, as can be seen especially in his frequent use of technical theological terms: by precision I mean exactness or, better, definitiveness of language. As I will argue implicitly throughout and explicitly in the case of Greville's best political poem, his persuasiveness often depends upon his defining of terms in a specific way, without making obvious to the reader that he is being given a definition at all. And what I mean by my third characteristic I have already suggested. While the late sixteenth-century sweet style was in its way elegant and even graceful, the sort of grace that Greville's style attains is dependent mainly upon its accuracy of understanding and expression--for, I would argue, such accuracy will necessarily have a certain grace.

It is a style, to give a concrete example, that can admit many adjectives, but always adjectives precise and necessary to the definition of the subject. The Romantic poets, as an obvious contrast, also relied on adjectives in their poetry, but those adjectives generally performed a service very

different from Greville's. Shelley's style, for instance, is heavy with adjectives, but compare

> Mother of this unfathomable world!
> Favour my solemn song . . . (Alastor 18-19)

or

> The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
> I see Cars drawn by rainbow-winged steeds
> Which trample the dim winds; in each there stands
> A wild-eyed charioteer . . . (Prometheus Unbound 129-32)

with the lines I've already praised:

> Eternall Truth, almighty, infinite,
> Onely exiled from mans fleshly heart . . .

Greville's adjectives, here as almost always, are necessary to the exact definition and understanding of the subject. As I have pointed out, the "almighty" and "infinite" make the "Onely exiled" a damning exclusion indeed, while "fleshly" is essential to the sense of wonder Greville here creates: although God is almighty and infinite and man but "fleshly," it is only from the heart of that fleshly creature that God can be "exiled." Shelley's adjectives, on the other hand, "impose on his readers and on himself [as F.R. Leavis says of Conrad's in Heart of Darkness] . . . a 'significance' that is merely an emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce" (180). Here I return to my point about Greville's tact. There are two ways, speaking crudely, that adjectives can work, one exemplified here by Shelley's poetry and the other by Greville's. Shelley, on the one hand, depends on adjectives to create a feeling, the empty

"emotional insistence" that Leavis finds in Heart of Darkness, that he thinks will contribute to the mood, the tone, the atmosphere, maybe even somehow to the meaning of his poem. In the lines from Alastor, "unfathomable" and "solemn" merely point at qualities that should appear in the poetry itself: if the song he sings, his poem, is not evidently solemn already, then he will not be able to make it so by so calling it. And in the five adjectives (two of them compound) in the three and a half lines I've quoted from Prometheus Unbound, adjectives whose purpose is to excite the senses and which succeed only in making the lines seem extravagant, Shelley has almost abandoned his meaning in favour of sight and sound. Greville, on the other hand, uses adjectives to make more exact his nouns, to define them further, to force his reader's understanding to approximate his own as nearly as possible.

In addition to its style, another feature of XCVII that exemplifies Greville's usual technique is its organization. Although it doesn't have what one would call strictly logical or argumentative structure, it does proceed rationally from its initial apostrophe to its conclusion.[4] The five quatrains and couplet can be broken down into individual paraphrases that outline Greville's subject:

1) God, you are infinite, and the only place in the universe that you are not found is man's heart;

2) and even when your mercy grants us the means of salvation

3) and you bid us pray, we pray insufficiently and insincerely,

4) and while we speak of you and pray to Christ, we are hypocrites,

5) for, as we say one thing and do another,

6) we perpetuate Christ's suffering because He is too good for us to comprehend, though we hope someday ("yet") to believe Him to be as bad as we are.

This summary of course leaves out much of what makes the poem exceptional, but it does demonstrate that the poem's paraphrasable content is a rational statement about man's relationship to God, and a statement that is pointed and genuinely moving even in this bare form. What does make XCVII not simply a moving statement but an exceptional poem is Greville's style, of which each element contributes to the poem's meaning and effect.

The next poem in my group of four, XCVIII, begins with the speaker in roughly the same state as was man in general in the previous poem: "Wrapt vp" in "degeneration." This last is a technical theological term for Greville; "degenerate" means "having lost the qualities that are normal and desirable or proper to its kind, fallen from former excellence." And it is fallen man that Greville is writing about in these poems. While in the last poem the condemnation was of mankind in general, this poem finds the particular speaker "wrapped up," implicated in, enmeshed in, the general degeneracy of the

human race, which has fallen away and, according to the last poem, continues to fall away ("still," l. 21) from its initial perfection. Like the previous poem, this one is addressed to God, but unlike its predecessor this poem is extremely personal, and its repeated confession "mine iniquity / Deserues this hell" outdoes even the crushing judgement of "Wee pray to Christ, yet helpe to shed his blood." And like the previous poem but even more obviously, this poem has a rational organization, essentially governed by the refrain:

> Wrapt vp, O Lord, in mans degeneration,
> The glories of thy truth, thy ioyes eternall,
> Reflect vpon my soule darke desolation,
> And vgly prospects o're the sprites infernall.
> Lord, I haue sinn'd, and mine iniquity,
> Deserues this hell; yet Lord deliuer me.
>
> Thy power and mercy neuer comprehended,
> Rest lively imag'd in my Conscience wounded;
> Mercy to grace, and power to feare extended,
> Both infinite, and I in both confounded;
> Lord, I haue sinn'd, and mine iniquity,
> Deserues this hell, yet Lord deliver me.
>
> If from this depth of sinne, this hellish graue,
> And fatall absence from my Sauiours glory,
> I could implore his mercy, who can saue,
> And for my sinnes, not paines of sinne, be sorry:
> Lord, from this horror of iniquity,
> And hellish graue, thou would'st deliuer me.

The first two refrains are set off from the quatrains they follow by end-stopped punctuation (period and semicolon)[3] and are separate formal confessions and pleas for salvation: "Lord, I haue sinn'd, and mine iniquity, / Deserues this hell; [,] yet Lord deliuer me." The final one, however, is set off from its quatrain by a colon, connected to it by the "If" that begins the quatrain, and provides the logical conclusion not

only of that quatrain but of the whole poem: "If . . . / . . . / I could implore his mercy . . . / And for my sinnes . . . be sorry: / Lord, from this horror of iniquity, / And hellish graue, thou would'st deliuer me." With the help of this changing refrain, the poem makes palpable Greville's acceptance of his own sinfulness, but the last stanza (I will argue later) manages, while condemning the poet soundly, to suggest that there is yet hope for his soul, if only Greville can fulfill the conditions he sets forth. The hope depends on those conditions being recognized and fulfilled at the same time.

So in these two poems Greville posits first mankind's condition and then one man's state, and first defines mankind's position relative to God and then explains how that position, a hopeless and treacherous one, might be changed for the individual. It is in the next poem in the sequence, the poem that most of Greville's critics consider his best, that he realizes in his verse that change of position. Through the experience described and enacted in XCIX--the realization both of his depravity and of the infinite efficacy of Christ--Greville attains in his triumphant final line to no less than his own salvation: "Thus hath his death rais'd up this soule of mine."

It is the actual writing of the poem for Greville, and the understanding of it for the reader, that produces the salvation. As C.Q. Drummond says of Ben Jonson's poem "On My

First Son," the poet's salvation or damnation actually rests on the precision with which he can make clear his own understanding of the state of his soul in the writing of the poem.' And the reader's work of interpretation, if performed successfully, will force him to grasp the truth of the poet's understanding. Here then is the poem:

> Downe in the depth of mine iniquity,
> That vgly center of infernall spirits;
> Where each sinne feeles her owne deformity,
> In these peculiar torments she inherits,
> Depriu'd of humane graces, and diuine,
> Euen there appeares this sauing God of mine.
>
> And in this fatall mirrour of transgression,
> Shewes man as fruit of his degeneration,
> The errours ugly infinite impression,
> Which beares the faithlesse downe to desperation;
> Depriu'd of humane graces and diuine,
> Euen there appeares this sauing God of mine.
>
> In power and truth, Almighty and eternall,
> Which on the sinne reflects strange desolation,
> With glory scourging all the Sprites infernall,
> And vncreated hell with vnpriuation;
> Depriu'd of humane graces, not diuine,
> Euen there appeares this saving God of mine.
>
> For on this sp'rituall Crosse condemned lying,
> To paines infernall by eternall doome,
> I see my Sauiour for the same sinnes dying,
> And from that hell I fear'd, to free me, come;
> Depriu'd of humane graces, not diuine,
> Thus hath his death rais'd up this soule of mine.

Yvor Winters and a number of later critics, including Richard Waswo, Douglas Peterson, Thom Gunn, and Fred Inglis, have explicated this poem clearly, and although there have been occasional disagreements--Dennis Danielson, for example, finds Winters' explanation (50) that "depriu'd" is by modern standards a dangling participle unconvincing, and constructs

an elaborate argument about the concept of "naughtiness" to demonstrate that it is actually Christ who is "Depriu'd of humane graces and diuine"[7] (an argument I find unconvincing and even implausible)--there isn't much doubt about what the poem means. Although it is dense, like many of Greville's poems, it is at no point obscure (despite Danielson's efforts to make it appear so). What hasn't been demonstrated, however, is the effect Greville achieves in the poem, and this hasn't been demonstrated because the poem itself is the only such demonstration necessary or even possible. Although this poem, like most good poems and perhaps even more so than many good poems, is clearly paraphrasable, it, even more obviously than XCVII, depends upon the details of its style for its profound effect on the comprehending reader. However, I would like to point to a few of those details that compel the sort of understanding that I have suggested the serious reader will possess as he successfully interprets the poem.

To begin with, although the poem may be understood alone, it follows XCVII and XCVIII for obvious reasons. If the first of these poems demonstrates forcibly the fact of mankind's depravity and the second personalizes that depravity in Greville's recognition of his own implication in the fact of sin, the end of XCVIII has Greville both wishing and believing, with a subtlety that may exceed the possibilities of English grammar, that if he could only be genuinely sorry for his sins God would save him, while at the same time

leaning toward the realization that this has, as it theologically must have, already happened.[8] By using the conditional construction in this way, to set out the condition and suggest that the condition has already been fulfilled--for it is Greville's recognition in the line "And for my sinnes, not paines of sinne, be sorry" that fulfills the condition at the same time that it describes it--Greville shows himself and his reader that it is through the writing of the poem, which finally led him to this line, that he has attained the recognition of his salvation. And the beginning of XCIX has Greville, apparently having succeeded in this proper sorrow, in the depths, not of his pains, but of his own iniquity--that is, the pain is felt not simply by Greville but, in a remarkable transference reminiscent of Dante, by his sins themselves, each according to its peculiar bent, or defect, or "deformity." The grammar at the end of XCVIII must indeed have been pushed to its limit, so that Greville's leaning toward the correct form of sorrow has here been transformed into actual felt apprehension of it. Winters' point about the apparent dangling participle seems irrefutable already and especially in this first stanza: the four lines leading up to "Depriu'd" have as their clear subject Greville himself, and to ignore, as Danielson does, the intense feeling Greville manages to convey through the accumulation of gruesome details is to demonstrate that one doesn't understand the poem, or feel one's own implication in Greville's

indictments.

In the Inferno, Dante portrays the damned souls suffering exactly those pains that they chose to visit upon themselves in life: their punishment is to follow for all time the path they have chosen while alive. This is what happens to Greville's sins in the personal hell of his soul, where each sin "inherits" its "peculiar torment." Here Greville's meaning is suggested by OED: "inherit" can mean "To come into possession of, as one's right or divinely assigned portion." OED might have gone further and cited Greville, who means this and more: here the sins "inherit" their torments from themselves, just as Dante's damned souls might precisely be said to "inherit" their eternal punishments from their living selves--the immortal soul inherits the mortal person's sinful habits and thus the appropriate punishment, which for Dante are one and the same thing. And for Greville as well, whose sins before his death already suffer their own peculiar punishment--"peculiar" here meaning "that belongs or pertains to, or characterizes, an individual" (OED). So each punishment, whether for the soul in Dante or specifically for the sin in Greville, is appropriate: "each sinne feeles her own deformity," and, as Thom Gunn points out (38), "feel" here means not only "feel" but also "recognize." To recognize one's own deformity is to see it as deformity, and, in this case, to accept one's punishment. Dante and Greville have the same sort of recognition in mind; the only difference is

Greville's personification of sins as guilty "souls" each with its own fault.

And, pace Danielson, it is obviously Greville who is down in this depth, and who is thus deprived of all graces. The point of the couplet is made by the heavy stress in the initial foot of its second line, and it is the point of the poem (although this point is not made fully until the poem's last line): even in this profound hell of Greville's sinful soul, "Euen there" does his saving God appear. This is in a way an answer to the poet's own claim in XCVII that man's heart is the only place in the universe from which God can be excluded: in this poem, despite the poet's degeneracy, his saving God will appear to harrow his own private hell.

The poem's first and second stanzas invert the order of the subjects of XCVII and XCVIII. While the first of these poems considered mankind and the second the poet's own soul, the first stanza of XCIX deals with Greville and the second expands that treatment to the state of mankind. Having described God's appearance in the depth of his own sinful soul, Greville uses one of his most powerful metaphors to demonstrate one of the things that God does for us. Though man traditionally is the image of God (in CII man takes "life and fashion" [fashion, I take it, meaning appearance or, more precisely, "image"] from "his Maker wise"), here God is a mirror in which we see our own sinfulness. While in LXXXVII God is "that eternall glasse," and in XCI "our flesh" is "the

vanities false glasse," and in CV Fortune is "a wat'ry glasse," in this poem God is a "mirrour of transgression," and in the sequence's final poem He is addressed as both "mirrour of transgression" and "sinlesse pure impression." This working and reworking of the untraditional conception of God as mirror is the best example of what I mentioned earlier, Greville's definition and redefinition of words through repeated use in similar but slightly different contexts so as to create ever more exactly the necessary meaning.

The last line of this quatrain is almost a definition of "degeneration." Just as one who is saved is not static but is continually "generating" his own salvation, so the "degenerate" are always doing sin and thus continually creating their own damnation. The "fruit" of man's degeneration is its continual bearing of him "down to desperation" (and this is a particularly acute psychological insight as well). What we also see in this stanza is Greville's astonishing (considering his earlier fears) dissociation of himself from the mass of mankind, the "faithless": he is obviously not borne "down to desperation" with them, because, as the refrain makes clear once again, even down in that depth, there is God. The refrain, in fact, enacts Greville's salvation, just as Christ's sacrifice is continual and eternal--each time Greville fears (and finds good reasons to expect) his damnation, Christ is there to save him, just as each time we sin Christ is ready to take our sins

upon Himself. This is one more way in which this poem is an actual enactment of the poet's understanding of and belief in his own salvation. The reader who attends to each detail of the poem's style, who follows the difficult syntax of the second stanza, who takes the point of the scourging of "vncreated hell with vnpriuation," will feel Greville's metre working on him in "And from that hell I fear'd, to free me, come," and will apprehend both intellectually and emotionally the force of the last line's triumphant conclusion: "Thus."

While the first stanza was about Greville's soul, then, and the second was about mankind (excluding Greville himself), the third places the poet in the midst of God's work, as He "scourges" infernal spirits and hell itself. The first line of the stanza is an echo of the first line of XCVII: there, God was addressed as "Eternal Truth, almighty, infinite," and here He is described as acting "In power and truth, Almighty and eternall." And just as God is in the second stanza the "mirrour" that shows "the errours vgly infinite impression," here His power and truth reflect "strange desolation"--the "vncreated" state that St. Thomas describes as evil, opposed to the goodness of being <u>qua</u> being--on the sin. God scourges the "Sprites" with glory and hell with "vnpriuation," or lack of being. Once the poet's personal hell has been "harrowed" in this way, he is no longer deprived of divine grace, as the refrain changes one word to tell us.

And if that refrain has provided the assurance of

Greville's salvation three times up to this point, it need not be the job of the poem's final stanza to reassure Greville or his reader of that salvation. But the stanza does begin with a conjunction that usually signals a logical conclusion: "For." But what is it for which Greville is here giving a reason? For the very assurance that comes with the refrain. What this stanza does is essentially to repeat and make more specific the assurance of salvation provided in the refrain, and to explain both how God has saved the poet, and how the poet knows this to be so. That is, the refrain is not merely the statement of "blind faith" that Gunn believes it to be (38), although of course faith is necessary to the acceptance of the repeated assertion, and although the full explanation is not given until the poem's last line, with its explicit "Thus." The last stanza's quatrain describes the way in which man, and specifically Greville, is saved: his Saviour is suffering for "the same sins" that Greville made the subject of his first stanza, and in this way frees Greville from the actual hell (as opposed to the personal hell of his soul described in the first stanza) that he has feared being cast into. The last line both concludes the poem on a satisfyingly final assertion and, with its strong initial trochee that puts the stress on "Thus" and its repetition of the personal possessive pronoun that throughout the poem has emphasized Greville's recognition and acceptance of the responsibility for his personal sins--"mine"--enforces the feeling that such

an assertion, if it is felt to be true (as Greville obviously feels it to be, and as we do if we have fully apprehended his meaning), will bring with it--positive and assured relief, and joy: "Thus hath his death rais'd up this soul of mine." Characteristically, even at such a profoundly personal and emotional moment, Greville delays till the end the personal pronoun. It is not only for the sake of the rhyme and metre --although it is certainly for those reasons too--that Greville did not simply write "Thus hath his death rais'd up my soul," which would nicely parallel "his death" and "my soul": the delay of "of mine" makes the saving of Greville's soul seem more objectively observed, and at the same time it more explicitly equates "this soul of mine" with "this . . . God of mine" of the previous refrains: only personal acceptance of God can save the individual soul.

After the seemingly insuperable barriers between God and man that Greville listed in XCVII and XCVIII, this poem's resolution of the problem is nonetheless profound and believable. In this single poem Greville accomplishes what neither Herbert nor Donne ever does nearly so convincingly: starting from a felt conviction of absolute depravity, he manages in twenty-four lines to attain to a palpably true assurance of his own salvation and the possibility of salvation for any human who is willing to seek it--God willing, of course. Gunn accurately sums up the effect of the poem: "the needed assurance of God's saving power does not

remain merely the illogical assertion of faith: it is embodied in the entire complex experience of the poem" (39).

If Greville attains to this assurance in XCIX, then, and if Caelica is, as I have claimed, a sequence, why did he write ten more poems, why are they not all concerned with religious matters, and why have I said that the last poem is a member of this essential group of four? I will attempt to answer these questions after considering the final poem in the sequence, CIX:

Syon lyes waste, and thy Ierusalem,
O Lord, is falne to vtter desolation,
Against thy Prophets, and thy holy men,
The sinne hath wrought a fatall combination,
Prophan'd thy name, thy worship overthrowne,
And made thee liuing Lord, a God vnknowne.

Thy powerfull lawes, thy wonders of creation,
Thy Word incarnate, glorious heauen, darke hell,
Lye shadowed vnder Mans degeneration,
Thy Christ still crucifi'd for doing well,
Impiety, O Lord, sits on thy throne,
Which makes thee liuing Light, A God vnknowne.

Mans superstition hath thy truths entomb'd,
His Atheisme againe her pomps defaceth,
That sensuall vnsatiable vaste wombe
Of thy seene Church, thy vnseene Church disgraceth;
There liues no truth with them that seem thine own,
Which makes thee liuing Lord, a God vnknowne.

Yet vnto thee, Lord, (mirrour of transgression)
Wee, who for earthly Idols, haue forsaken
Thy heauenly Image (sinlesse pure impression)
And so in nets of vanity lye taken,
All desolate implore that to thine owne,
Lord, thou no longer liue a God vnknowne.

Yet Lord let Israels plagues not be eternall,
Nor sinne for ever cloud thy sacred Mountaines,
Nor with false flames spirituall but infernall,
Dry up thy mercies euer springing fountaines,
Rather, sweet Iesus, fill vp time and come,
To yeeld the sinne her euerlasting doome.

This poem, like many of the late poems in Caelica, is a triumph of Greville's style, the style that was required by his beliefs and which his beliefs helped to create. Here is what Richard Waswo says of this poem:

> The stark, terrifying plea for annihilation is made possible only by the complete renunciation of self, which results in complete comprehension of sin and acceptance of God's justice in destroying it--an acceptance (on faith alone, for God is beyond understanding) so complete that this very justice is seen as mercy. (149)

That renunciation of self is actually accomplished in XCVIII and especially the first stanza of XCIX, but is made explicit as well in this poem's fourth stanza, which implicates, as did XCVII, all humankind. It does so precisely with the initial trochee in its second line: "Wee, who . . ." That the stress is on "Wee" and not on "who" is clear from the earlier poems, in which Greville is careful to implicate all men in sin; here, that is, the "who" does not limit the "Wee" but explains what all mankind is guilty of.

Although Waswo's explanation is accurate, what also must be emphasized, aside from the precise details of style that distinguish the poem, is its structure, which, to some extent like that of each of the four poems I have been discussing, depends for its success largely on the accumulation of details, here details of man's degeneracy and the apparent hopelessness of his condition. Out of this poem's five stanzas, the first three list detail upon detail of man's apostasy, each stanza concluded by a refrain that summarizes

the particular hypocrisy or blasphemy detailed in the stanza. Not until the fourth stanza is the plea that Waswo concentrates upon made: "Yet . . . Wee . . . implore." And in the fifth stanza Greville makes his actual plea, which is every bit as stark and terrifying as Waswo claims: "sweet Iesus, fill vp time, and come." It is this plea especially that places this poem in the group of poems I have been discussing, for surely only a man secure in his own salvation could so clearly desire the end of his world and his life, and who could be so eager for sin and himself to be "doomed," that is, both condemned and judged. The final couplet of this poem, then, seals the assurance that Greville has found in XCIX: he knows that Christ's death has raised up his soul already, so the Last Judgement holds nothing for him to fear; but as one of God's people he is correct in being eager for sin to be forever condemned and thus ended by Christ's second coming.

The details of Greville's style in this poem work at every point to enforce and, as in XCIX, to enact his meaning. Here is Thom Gunn: "In this poem the simplicity of language, the directness of tone, and the lively variations in the verse movement, all serve to insist on the personal grief behind the public utterance" (40). Gunn is missing a great deal in the poem if he wants to talk about its "simplicity of language," but I suspect that what ne wants to praise is rather the poem's clarity, which is a different thing altogether: a piece

of writing may contain nothing but "simple" language and yet be obscure, and again may be clear while written in complex language. This last is the case with CIX. To talk about the "seene Church" as a "sensuall vnsatiable vaste wombe" is not to use what we normally call "simple language"; it is to use highly metaphorical language.

And I am unsure as well of what Gunn means by "directness of tone." If "tone" may be defined as "the author's attitude toward his subject and his audience," then Greville's tone is certainly clear in this poem (it is in fact, and not illogically, created by the clarity of his nonetheless often complex language), but how it (or any tone) could be "direct" I don't know. And finally, Gunn's adjective in his third claim disturbs me: although there are ten or eleven variations (not counting Greville's characteristic hendecasyllabic lines)[9] in the thirty lines of the poem, they are all of the two most common varieties--initial inverted feet (in lines one, twenty, twenty-four, and twenty-nine) and elisions (in lines two, seven, eight [twice], fourteen, twenty-one, perhaps in twenty-five ["Israels"], and twenty-seven)--and none is what I would be tempted to call "lively." Rather, as is usual in Greville (as in Sidney, and as in so many of the early plain-style poets from whom Greville clearly learned so much), the attention paid to the regular iambic line, and the work the normal metrical emphases do in such lines, is probably more important than the variations. What the variations often

do in Greville is point more exactly to the precision with which metrical and speech stress are made to reinforce the meaning in the regular lines that make up the majority in any of his poems. So line nine's regularity, and the necessity of stressing each syllable in the pentasyllabic "degeneration," is made more noticeable by the elisions in the third and fourth feet of line eight:

> Thy Word incarnate, glorious heauen, darke hell,
> Lye shadowed vnder Mans degeneration . . .

I have cited Gunn not simply to disagree with him, however, but to make more exactly the points I think he means to make. As I have said, I think what he means by "simplicity of language" is "clarity of expression," which is often to be praised in Greville, and which needs to be praised because it is often not so evident as it is here. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, often enough Greville's desire never to waste words renders his thought obscure. Gascoigne, in his Certayne Notes of Instruction, advises the prospective poet to "avoyde prolixitie and tediousnesse . . . since brevitie (so that it be not drowned in obscuritie) be most commendable." Although Greville is seldom tedious (with the exception of a few passages in his Treaties) and probably never prolix, his brevity is not infrequently "drowned in obscuritie." Such is not the case in this poem, however.

And I would call Greville's tone assured, if not "direct." I have said before and will say again that I believe it was Greville's theology and philosophy that largely

determined his poetic style, and there are few of his poems whose tone is not pretty obvious. This is not to say that his tone in the sequence is invariant or monotonous, however. It ranges from sincere if artificial (not a contradiction) admiration in poems such as I, III, VI, and XIV to a clear sense of being wronged in many of the poems to Caelica (including the poems I will discuss in the next section of this chapter) to a combination of abasement and reverence in the great religious poems I have been examining; and this description omits many other tones I might characterize in various other poems.

Finally, Gunn probably means by "lively variations" to praise Greville's subtle handling of the pentameter line, and that praise is deserved. But as I have said, minute but meaningful variations are more common in Greville than "lively" ones, and his modulations of the regular iambic line are more significant than his variations in any case.

This poem is notable for one further reason: it is clearly a final poem. Whatever one thinks of the claim that Caelica is a deliberately organized sequence, one cannot imagine another poem in the same book following this poem's couplet. And as a final poem, it must and does summarize the main issues of the sequence: man's, woman's, and Greville's depravity; the futility of earthly pursuits; God's unfathomable grace. As I have claimed before and will soon demonstrate, even in many of the early poems addressed to

Caelica (who, we must presume, is the important character early in the sequence that bears her name), it is mankind's depravity that is ultimately at issue in Greville's examination of the machinations of earthly love. Greville's editor Geoffrey Bullough says that "The last poem . . . sums up the effect of the whole group of politico-religious poems so well that it may have been placed there for that reason" (51). I will add that it sums up, especially in stanza four, the effect of the love poems as well--Greville's greatest "earthly Idol," after all, was Cupid. In this poem, Greville gives his sequence a grand, if bleak, closure--all that can follow this poem is the day of judgement.

Before I go on to discuss the style of the earlier poems in Caelica, I have to account for poems C through CVIII. There are two questions to answer about these nine poems: if I am right about the way XCVII, XCVIII, XCIX, and CIX function as a group, why is the last member of the group at a nine-poem remove from the others? and, if the best late poems in Caelica are those addressed to or about God, why do those nine intervening poems not deal exclusively with religious subjects?

I can answer with certainty neither question, but I can suggest strong possibilities. There is no reason, first of all, for Greville to have discarded the nine very interesting poems he may have written between the triumphant XCIX and the conclusive CIX: a poet cannot always write the poem he wants

when he wants to write it. Besides, he may not, by the time he wrote XCIX, have said all that he wanted to say on the subjects of politics and religion. And as Bullough points out, the political and religious poems earlier in the sequence are closely allied, and the final poem takes account of both politics and religion. Why then could the tight group I have described not have accommodated a few extra poems?

It is possible as well that Greville conceived and wrote XCVII, XCVIII, XCIX, and CIX as a group, but chose to insert the nine other poems where he did because CIX is so obviously a conclusion, and yet he wanted the reader's understanding of poems C through CVIII, and his understanding of the poet's understanding of the poems' subjects, to be informed by the certainty of "Thus hath his death rais'd up this soul of mine." The poet's observations about politics and religion will be perceived differently if we understand him to believe himself saved rather than damned; perhaps Greville was being careful to manipulate the reader's understanding of the matter of these poems.

Whatever his reasons for including these poems in this position, CIX is clearly conclusive. Its style is Greville's finest, the style he spent his poetic career working toward. And this style, like that of the other three poems I have discussed, is thus the standard against which I would now like to consider some of Greville's earlier poems on the subjects of love and politics.

In this first poem of his sequence, Greville shows himself to be very much a man of his time:

> LOVE, the delight of all well-thinking minds;
> Delight, the fruit of vertue dearely lov'd;
> Vertue, the highest good, that reason finds;
> Reason, the fire wherein mens thoughts bee prov'd;
> Are from the world by Natures power bereft,
> And in one creature, for her glory, left.
>
> Beautie, her couer is, the eyes true pleasure;
> In honours fame she liues, the eares sweet musicke;
> Excesse of wonder growes from her true measure;
> Her worth is passions wound, and passions physicke;
> From her true heart, cleare springs of wisdome flow,
> Which imag'd in her words and deeds, men know.
>
> Time faine would stay, that she might never leave her,
> Place doth reioyce, that she must needs containe her,
> Death craues of Heauen, that she may not bereaue her,
> The Heauens know their owne, and doe maintaine her;
> Delight, Love, Reason, Vertue let it be,
> To set all women light, but only she.

As Richard Waswo says, "It would be difficult to find another poem that presents as economically the rationale, effects, and literary methods of Renaissance courtly love" (45). Employing the language of Renaissance neo-Platonism and the rhetorical strategies of reduplication and personification, Greville writes a poem in praise of an unnamed woman who embodies love, delight, virtue, and reason; who is "covered" by beauty, famous for her honour, and exceedingly wondrous and worthy; and who tempts time to stop and death to change its nature, makes "place" rejoice, and is "maintained" by the heavens themselves. He writes, that is, a poem that, aside from the inclusiveness that Waswo notes, might have been in its subject and methods indistinguishable from a great many other poems

of the late sixteenth century. But this poem is unmistakably Greville's.

First of all, eight of the poem's eighteen lines are hendecasyllabic. Greville early discovered the effects that the regular use of lines ending on a weakly stressed syllable could produce; in fact, the effect that he achieves in this poem's last stanza by ending each line of the quatrain with "her" is remarkable. By this use of what here at least might precisely be called a feminine ending, Greville emphasizes --gently, as is appropriate--his compliment to the unnamed "her."[10] The double rhyme allows the greatest stress to fall on the verbs "leave," "contain," "bereave," and "maintain," while including a reference to "her," the subject of the poem, in each line. This masterly pointing, which, with the thrice-repeated pronoun, forces more stress on that word than would normally be accorded a weakly stressed syllable, is typical of Greville's way of achieving grace, or what I have earlier called elegance: for Greville, elegance is inseparable from accuracy.

Secondly, Greville's choice of emphases in this inflated compliment is characteristic. As I have said, this sort of poem was conventional, but while Sidney, to make an obvious comparison, is willing to spend 141 lines of a 146-line poem in praise of a woman describing in loving detail only her physical beauty ("What tongue can her perfections tell"), only to leave the description of the goodness of her soul to

heaven,[11] Greville's main interest in this poem is obviously in the woman's spiritual excellence. Although he mentions the woman's beauty in line 7, it is only a "cover" that gives the observer's eyes pleasure; and her appearance is clearly subordinate to her virtue, reason, honour, and worth--her spiritual qualities. In fact, her appearance seems to be nearly beside the point of the poem. Even her wondrousness is attributed not to her beauty but to her essence: "Excesse of wonder growes from her true measure." And one of the finest compliments of all comes in the couplet of stanza two: "From her true heart, cleare springs of wisdome flow, / Which imag'd in her words and deeds, men know." That is, not only is she true and wise, but her words and actions are "images" of those qualities--we would say that her actions reflect her beliefs. At any rate, Greville is obviously more concerned with spiritual than with physical beauty, and thus his implicit neo-Platonic point is made even stronger. Most of the love poems in Caelica will demonstrate that an infatuation with a woman's beauty and a corresponding neglect of her character will bring the poet only woe. This first poem of the sequence is thus a standard against which much of what follows may be measured.

Thirdly, the poem exhibits to a degree Greville's characteristic style. Greville's style is the subject of much of what has been written about his poetry in this century, and that's largely because Yvor Winters, who "discovered" Greville

for the twentieth century and to whom most critics of Greville are more or less indebted, was mainly concerned with style. Following Winters', most characterizations of Greville's style have observed that Greville seems to borrow subjects and procedures from both the plain and the sweet styles. Early in the sequence this amalgam is often obvious; later the style becomes integral, and not easily analysed into its components in any given poem. To take the example at hand, Caelica I is obviously not written in the plain style. For one thing, although a plain-style poem might very well be written in praise of an honourable woman, no plain-style poet would ever claim that love, delight, virtue, and reason "Are from the world by Natures power bereft, / And in one creature, for her glory, left." The employment of this sort of patent falsehood in the service of a woman's praise is a technique of the sweet style--as are the uses to which the personifications of time, place, death, and heaven are put in the third stanza. And the delicate feminine endings in the second and third stanzas are not generally the sort of thing associated with the plain style, which favours masculine endings.

But this is clearly not a sweet-style poem, either. If the claims made about love, delight, virtue, and reason are not true, neither, as I have suggested earlier, is the insistence on a woman's virtue and especially her reason a normal feature of the sweet-style poem of praise. In most of

the poems in Astrophil and Stella, for example, Stella is praised for her beauty; in some for her virtue as well; in none, so far as I can see, is she praised seriously for her reason. (And of course her honour is in question even in the tiny freedoms she permits Astrophil; she certainly could not be said to live "In honours fame.") And the couplet I have quoted above from the second stanza of Greville's poem ends with the strong iamb generally found in plain-style poems' aphoristic assertions of truth: "men know" of the woman's truth and wisdom by her actions, and the emphasis in the iamb leaves no doubt that that is what is most important in her. Women are not, as a rule, praised for their wisdom in the sweet style--unless that wisdom leads them to love the poet.

This style of Greville's, the style that, I have argued, he perfects in the late religious poems in the sequence, is a combination of the plain and sweet styles, and is in few of the later poems easily categorizable as one or the other. It is a version, I believe, of the "noticeably unnoticeable" style that J.V. Cunningham finds in "Donne's early poetry at its best" and that is, he says, perfected and established by Ben Jonson (323-24). Greville's style is usually not like Donne's or Jonson's in particulars, but it serves the same purpose; it is

> A style that can handle circumstantiality and detail, can accommodate in poetry what we think of as the material of prose, and yet without modulation of manner can strike through to the heart of human feeling. (323)

This is precisely what Greville's style at its best, as in

Caelica XCIX and CIX, does; and this is the sort of thing that it is already approaching in the poem I have been discussing. Greville's problem is this: how to praise a woman's wisdom and virtue, but do it beautifully, without seeming to try too hard? The poem invites comparison with Jonson's "An Elegy," poem XXII of Underwoods. Here is the first stanza of that poem:

> Though beauty be the mark of praise,
> And yours of whom I sing be such
> As not the world can praise too much,
> Yet is't your virtue now I raise. (158-59)

Jonson's poem, which, as the last line says, "raises" not the woman's beauty but her virtue, nevertheless begins by praising her beauty in exaggerated terms. This is one immediately reasonable way of solving the problem that I posed for Greville above. If a poem of praise conventionally takes as its subject physical beauty, but the poet is more interested in virtue or wisdom, why not begin anyway by praising beauty, and then use that as a "mark" above which the woman's virtue can be measured?

In "An Elegy," says Wesley Trimpi, "Jonson introduces a kind of serious moral statement which had not been characteristic of the love elegy" (229). And he does so in a style that combines the loveliness and grace of the sweet style and the accuracy of the plain style, so that he may call the woman "the deity / To whom all lovers are designed" without undercutting the truth of the praise he means for her. He can tell an untruth (or, we might more fairly say, use a

metaphor that exaggerates the truth), that is, but use it to enforce the truth of his essential claim.

That Greville can manage something like this sort of praise, and that he chooses to do so in the first poem of his sequence, says a great deal both about his command of style and about his constant concern with truth and virtue. Sidney, for example, does on many occasions praise Stella's virtue --notably in Astrophil and Stella 71, the poem upon which Jonson's elegy is clearly based--but that praise is almost always (as is usually the case too with Donne) given in service of some description of the poet's own state. So the second poem of Sidney's sequence unconventionally admits that Astrophil did not fall in love with Stella at first sight, "But known worth did in mine of time proceed, / Till by degrees it had full conquest got." This praise of Stella's "known worth" is unexpected so early in a Petrarchan sonnet sequence, and the admission and the praise both strike the reader as honest and moving. After all, while it would certainly have been flattering for Stella to be told that her beauty made Astrophil love her the moment he saw her, the greater praise is surely that which he chooses to give: her "worth," observed and admired over a span of time, eventually won him to love her. However, that single line is the only one in the sonnet that refers to Stella at all, and even that does so only obliquely; the rest of the poem is concerned solely with Astrophil's mental state, with the "hell" of

unrequited love suffered by the speaker. Greville's first poem, however, is exclusively about the woman. Nowhere is the poet mentioned or even his relationship to the woman he so highly praises alluded to. The praise seems to be objective, and although the poet is certainly present in the feeling his carefully crafted lines, especially those in the last stanza, create, that feeling is so precisely controlled by the impersonality of the poet's statement--so objective is it that the woman is not even named--that the tone is one of reported fact. As Winters says, it is in Greville's "concern for his matter and in the corresponding indifference to his own personality that he differs equally from Sidney and from Donne" (52).

But if his concern for his matter largely creates the poem's impersonality, Greville's style, some of the features of which I have already discussed, is responsible for the achievement of the poem--the graceful praise of a woman's virtue, reason, and wisdom, almost to the exclusion of her beauty, and the concomitant creation of the feeling that these spiritual qualities are what <u>ought</u> to be praised in a woman. That is, although Greville says no more about her beauty than to characterize it as a "cover" that gives the eyes "true pleasure," we are never allowed to suspect that this is in any way a slight. The first poem of Greville's sequence suggests that his interest, in the inside rather than the outside of the woman, is the <u>correct</u> interest, and that we

oughtn't to worry too much about the woman's "cover."

Having thus praised Greville's achievement, I must now admit it to be a minor one. The comparison that I have suggested with Jonson's elegy demonstrates just how minor and, to some extent, awkward a poem Greville's is. His style, while it, like Jonson's, combines the methods and subjects of plain and sweet, is at most points in this early poem more noticeable than unnoticeable, and the stilted reduplications of the first stanza are reminiscent of the more clumsy uses of the same rhetorical figure in many early plain-style poems. However, most of the second stanza and especially its couplet look ahead to those poems in which Greville will perfect his own noticeably unnoticeable style, the style that will enable him to create the great intellectual and emotional works that are his late religious poems.

I would like next to consider a group of poems that have a common theme: woman's depravity as a response to man's devotion, and that depravity's manifestation in the woman's turn from devotion to one man to the promiscuous embracing of all men but the original one. The woman in most cases is Caelica or Myra[12] and the man Greville himself (so it seems to me), but to some extent the poems are obviously meant to have a universal application. The poems I have in mind are not printed as a group (although some are adjacent and most quite close one to the other in the sequence), but are so similar

in theme that they seem together to be an earlier version of the procedure I have shown Greville to be following in the four great religious poems: he works repeatedly with the same ideas and with many of the same terms until he has come to a satisfactory understanding of the problem he has posed for himself. The poems in this group are XII, XXXVIII, XXXIX, XLI, LXIV, and LXX. I can most easily explain my reason for choosing to call these six poems a group by quoting each poem's couplet:

XII: Till for more spite to Myra's heart he [Cupid] flyeth,
Where liuing to the world, to me he dieth.

XXXVIII: While that fine soyle, which all these ioyes did yeeld,
By broken fence is prou'd a common field.

XXXIX: But when I thought my selfe of her selfe free,
All's chang'd: she vnderstands all men but me.

XLI: Therefore the doome is, wherein thou must rest,
Myra that scorns thee, shall loue many best.

LXIV: For what before was fill'd by me alone,
I now discerne hath roome for euery one.

LXX: The Boy [again, Cupid] hath stolne your thoughts some other way,
Where wantonlike they doe with many play.

There are several other poems in which Greville more or less incidentally expresses the same treachery that is evident in each of these couplets. In XVIII, for example, he reports one of Caelica's complaints about him (the "I" here refers to the poet): "I grudge, she saith, that many should adore her"; in the famous XXII ("I with whose colours Myra dress'd her head") he asks "Must I look on, in hope time coming may / With change

bring back my turn again to play?", and "Must I look on a-cold, while others warm them?"; and in XLI, changing things round a bit, he tells "false Caelica" to "live free; / Seem fair to all the world, and foul to me." But it is in the six I have here grouped together that Greville's certainty that the woman he loves will not simply turn from him but will show forth her depravity by turning towards all other men is given its most thorough airing.

Greville is certainly not unique in his time even in this extension of the standard "changeable woman" theme to include the added wound of the woman's wantonly embracing all other men. Donne's Elegy 7 ("Natures lay Ideot"), to take an extreme example, recounts the education in love and sex that the poet gave his one-time innocent beloved, and then details in unpleasant metaphors the results of his teaching. The poem ends thus:

> I planted knowledge and lifes tree in thee,
> Which Oh, shall strangers taste? Must I alas
> Frame and enamell Plate, and drinke in Glasse?
> Chafe waxe for others seales? breake a colts force
> And leave him then, beeing made a ready horse?

Donne, however, is hardly innocent himself: his complaint is not that he has lost his true love, but that he has wasted his effort in teaching considerable sexual skills to a woman who then won't use them for his pleasure. Greville, however, in the poems I have listed, is at worst a starry-eyed fool; never is he so depraved as Donne seems to delight in demonstrating that <u>he</u> can be.

In most cases, Greville's mistake--and this is especially clear in the light of his later religious poems--is simply in trusting too much in a creature, who then perverts that trust in the worst possible way. I would like to look in detail now at several of these poems, and with at least one eye on the claim that I made at the beginning of this chapter: it is Greville's profound conviction of his and mankind's depravity that more than anything else determines both his subjects and his style.

Here is XII.

> Cupid, thou naughtie Boy, when thou wert loathed,
> Naked and blind, for vagabunding noted,
> Thy nakednesse I in my reason clothed,
> Mine eyes I gave thee, so was I deuoted.
>
> Fye Wanton, fie; who would shew children kindnesse?
> No sooner he into mine eyes was gotten,
> But straight he clouds them with a seeing blindnesse,
> Makes reason wish that reason were forgotten.
>
> From thence to Myra's eyes the Wanton strayeth,
> Where while I charge him with vngratefull measure,
> So with faire wonders he mine eyes betrayeth,
> That my wounds, and his wrongs, become my pleasure;
> Till for more spite to Myra's heart he flyeth,
> Where liuing to the world, to me he dieth.

It seems to me likely that this is one of the poems that Greville wrote either along with Sidney or in response to Sidney's Astrophil and Stella 65. Here are lines 1 and 5-8 of that poem:

> LOVE by sure proofe I may call thee unkind . . .
>
> For when, nak'd boy, thou coulds't no harbour find
> In this old world, growne now so too too wise,
> I lodg'd thee in my heart, and being blind
> By Nature borne, I gave to thee mine eyes.

As L.C. John notes (71-74), Greville gives the same conceit --one that with Sidney's poem makes its first appearance in English, though it is derived from Anacreontea 33--a different twist. Sidney's poem ends with a play on "arms," and describes the poet as kin to Cupid because Sidney's coat of arms features an arrowhead. Greville's poem, however, ends with Cupid fleeing into Myra's heart, where he dies to the poet but "lives" to all the world--where, that is, he makes Myra's love available to all but the poet.

This poem is notable also as one of the many in Caelica that establish Cupid as the god of Greville's youth, the god that will later be compared to, and found wanting in the comparison with, the true God that Greville later turns to. The poem that constitutes the turn in the sequence from earthly to divine love, LXXXIV, does so by invoking and finally rejecting Cupid, and uses--as is characteristic of Greville--many of the same terms that were used in earlier poems to and about Cupid: "sweet boy," "boy's play," "blindness," "devotion," and "wanton." In XII, Greville for the first time addresses Cupid by name, and for the first time attributes to him those qualities that will later be so important. By this point in the sequence, too, Greville's fondness for the hendecasyllabic line is finding full expression. With the likely exception of lines one and three (likely because "loathed" and "clothed" are here most easily pronouncable as monosyllables, although because of the norm

set by the rest of the poem they may be disyllabic), this sonnet is written entirely in eleven-syllable lines. What use Greville makes of this sort of line I will discuss later, but I will here say that I agree with Winters, who says of this propensity that when one reads sections of Caelica where the eleven-syllable line is frequently used "one feels a certain monotony in proceeding from poem to poem; yet within any given poem the medium is used with subtlety and power" (51).

Also characteristic of Greville is his making of a pleasant conceit into a medium for the serious exploration of a psychological truth. Cupid is traditionally blind, and most poets who invoke Cupid make some use of this tradition, but it is Greville who explores the implications of "giving" Cupid one's eyes, or being so overcome with love that one can see only with "love's eyes." Here the sacrifice is shown to be greater than that of sight alone: the poet also lends Cupid his reason ("Thy nakedness I in my reason clothed"). And the last two lines of the second stanza are extremely acute, for here Greville emphasizes that there is something worse than simply having neither sight nor reason. A "seeing blindness" is blindness that yet seems to be sight and is thus deceptive, while a reason that wants to forget itself is surely more dangerous, because treacherous, than a simple lack of reason. This is an example of Greville's use of Cupid, a common figure in love poetry, as a means by which to explore a truth about love: he exploits Cupid's traditional blindness and nakedness

and, without abandoning the vehicle of his metaphor, describes precisely and movingly what love can do to a devoted lover.

In the comparison I suggested earlier with Donne's elegy, I said that while that poem's speaker revels in a fantasy of his own corruption, Greville's faults are never shown to be so contemptible. In this poem he gives up his sight and reason, but does nothing dishonourable. His reward, however, is the same as Donne's: his beloved turns from him "to the world." Part of the difference between the two poems and the two poets is due to and expressed in their different styles. In a later chapter I will examine in detail Donne's style, but here I might mention a few of its obvious features as they are visible in the elegy from which I've earlier quoted. Donne, for example, goes much further than does Greville toward the approximation of speech. His medium is the heroic couplet, a formal medium, but by varying the caesurae and freely using enjambment he both breaks down the couplets into smaller units and allows them to fall into larger. Here are two passages in which he accomplishes these things:

> I had not taught thee then, the Alphabet
> Of flowers, how they devisefully being set
> And bound up, might with speechlesse secrecie
> Deliver arrands mutely, and mutually (9-12);
>
> And since, an houres discourse could scarce have made
> One answer in thee, and that ill arraid
> In broken proverbs, and torne sentences (17-19)

The caesurae in the first four of these lines fall after the third, first, and second feet and in the middle of the third; in the next three lines, after the first, in the middle of the

third, and again in the middle of the third. And the conjunction of syntax with metrical position creates strong enjambments between lines nine and ten and lines ten and eleven: both the preposition "of" and the conjunction "and" tend to lessen the pause at the end of the previous line and force the reader to complete quite rapidly the constructions "Alphabet of flowers" and "set and bound." The combination of many monosyllabic with few polysyllabic words, too--best seen in lines nine and eleven here--, tends to change the speed of the lines, because polysyllables in which every syllable is to be pronounced (rather than elided, as in "flowers," "devisefully," and "houres") take longer to pronounce and call some attention to themselves.

And Donne's diction, too, demonstrates to a large extent the range of his style. In a poem of only thirty lines he is able to accommodate "Ideot," "Foole," and "ready horse," but also "sighes," "flowers," and "blis-full Paradise." And he can write a poem part of which praises a lady, but in which the praise is for her treachery and her ability to deceive first her husband and then her lover. His achievement, then, is to choose a subject (the praise of a woman) normally associated with the sweet style, modify it (by praising bad qualities) to the sort of statement associated with the plain style, use some of the language appropriate to each style, tinker with the medium (the heroic couplet, which might be used in either style), and so produce a poem in which the

style is truly, I believe, noticeably unnoticeable at many points, especially insofar as it seems subordinate to the often shocking and vulgar matter. What then of Greville's style, in a poem that does some of the same things?

Greville too manages a sort of combination of the styles in XII. A poem--significantly, too, a sonnet--that begins "Cupid, thou naughty boy" and ends by suggesting that the woman who is the poem's tangential subject is indiscriminately promiscuous must have an affinity with each of the two styles. But Greville's prosody, diction, and tone are very different from Donne's.

Aside from the extra syllable in twelve of the poem's fourteen lines, there are only five metrical variations in the poem: inverted feet in lines one, two, three, five, and eleven. But Greville is able to achieve remarkable effects without departing more than this from the iambic norm and without much varying his caesurae--all the lines are divided either 2/3, 3/2, or 2 1/2 / 2 1/2. What he does do, however, is vary greatly the strength of stress within the feet of each line. Here are some lines that illustrate my point:

Thy nakedness I in my reason clothed (3);

Fye Wanton, fie; who would shew children kindnesse? (5);

That my wounds, and his wrongs, became my pleasure (12).

In each of these lines, Greville's syntax demands that weakly and strongly stressed syllables be given different degrees of stress depending upon their positions in the line. In line

three, for example, even though the third foot is inverted, the "I" receives considerably less stress than the first syllable of "reason," because of the importance of the prepositional phrase that specifies what the clothing the poet gave Cupid was. In line five, the first "Fye," although the weakly stressed syllable of its foot, still gets more stress than the first syllable of "kindnesse," because that line's first foot is so strong: it is the importance of the disyllabic "Wanton" and its placement that prevent the first foot's being read as a trochee, but "Fye" nevertheless is an important and strongly stressed word--stressed less, however, than the first syllable of "Wanton." And the same effect is achieved in the second and third feet of line twelve, where the syntax that seems to require the strong stress to fall on "his" (to balance the stress on its grammatical counterpart "my") is played against the strong metrical and rhetorical stress on the enunciatory "and" and the crucial "wrongs," the word that makes the psychological point of the line.

The effect of this modulation of stresses is in some places to come near to the approximation of rather formal speech, especially in the poem's second stanza. But my key word is "formal." Although the feminine endings lessen the formality of Greville's lines somewhat, the lines are still strongly end-stopped; and nobody would want to claim that the poem's last six lines sound like any kind of speech. But I will say that the poem's second stanza illustrates a style

that is noticeably unnoticeable, if the point of my emphasis is taken. Greville is at this early point in his sequence trying to find a style that will allow him, as Donne's allows him, to use what he needs from the two styles he knows so well, but to achieve with it effects that neither style alone would permit. As I have said, Greville is here still less accomplished than Donne, but less extreme as well. His diction, for example, never descends to "Ideot" or "foole," nor ascends to "blis-full Paradise"; it is much more temperate. The closest he comes to either of Donne's extremes is "Wanton," which loses much of its force when applied to a boy (and a fictional one at that) rather than a woman. And this temperance in diction, coupled with the formal informality produced by his use of regular metre with the modulation of stresses I've described and with the predominant feminine endings, determines the poem's tone. While the tone of Donne's elegy is, as J.B. Leishman accurately labels it, "contemptuous" (73)--and, I would add, self-consciously vulgar--that of Greville's poem is gently chiding, although with the hard edge that will inevitably accompany the sort of accusation with which the poem ends. By choosing to address, and expose the vicissitudes of, the god of love rather than Myra, Greville manages to accuse her of perfidy in a most gentlemanly voice.

The voice of the next poem I will discuss is not, however, easily characterized as gentlemanly. This is

XXXVIII:

Caelica, I ouernight was finely vsed,
Lodg'd in the midst of paradise, your Heart:
Kind thoughts had charge I might not be refused,
Of euery fruit and flower I had part.

But curious Knowledge, blowne with busie flame,
The sweetest fruits had downe in shadows hidden,
And for it found mine eyes had seene the same,
I from my paradise was straight forbidden.

Where that curre, Rumour, runnes in euery place,
Barking with Care, begotten out of feare;
And glassy Honour, tender of Disgrace,
Stands Ceraphin to see I come not there;
While that fine soyle, which all these ioyes did yeeld,
By broken fence is prou'd a common field.

This poem begins by describing Caelica as the garden of Eden, and ends by calling that garden "a common field," with the obvious implication about Caelica's virtue. It is a very different poem from the last; here, the speaker has at least "had part" of "euery fruit and flower" of the lady's "garden," and his banishment from those joys at the end is thus more strongly felt and more strongly expressed than in the last poem, in which we are given no proof that the poet ever did more than admire Myra. The shockingly contemptuous tone of the couplet makes it the strongest condemnation of the woman to be found in any of the poems in this group, and the poem's style, much more consistent than that of XII, is fully adequate to support that condemnation.

The first stanza, in its diction and rhythm, is a good example of the sweet style. The excessive compliment of calling Caelica's heart "paradise" and the inclusiveness of

"euery fruit and flower," coupled with the mellifluousness of the alliteration on "v" and "f" in the first and fourth lines, make the whole stanza lovely and sweet. This hyperbolic description at the beginning of a sonnet seems calculated to be only the beginning of a list of the qualities of the lady that make her heart describable as "paradise." But rarely even in such a poet as Donne, who loves to pervert Petrarchan niceties and subvert conventional expectations, will such a lovely beginning lead to such a contemptuous ending.

The second stanza is written in the sweet style as well, and is unremarkable. Its function is indicated by the "But" that begins its first line: it is clear at this point that the poem will, it seems, be a Petrarchan complaint of the form "Once we loved, but something happened, so now I mourn." The identity of the "something" varies from poem to poem, but the reason Greville gives in his poem is not an uncommon one: <u>because</u> he has enjoyed at least part of the "fruits" of Caelica's "garden," he is cast out from further such enjoyment. There are two things noteworthy in this stanza: the personalization of the general "paradise" mentioned in the first stanza to "my paradise" in this one--a personalization that makes the breaking of the fence around that paradise at the poem's end even more personally painful for the speaker --and the move toward the personification of "curious knowledge" in the stanza's first line, a move significant because of the near-personifications of rumour, care, fear,

honour, and disgrace in the last stanza.

It is in the odd third stanza that Greville changes the tone of his poem, and does so by changing abruptly from the sweet style of the poem's octave to a plain style that accommodates the near-personifications I have mentioned. The poet, who was earlier in his paradise, is now driven out, and his way back is barred by "Honour, tender of Disgrace, / [who] Stands Ceraphin." The personification of abstractions like these is most often a function of the plain style, and although Greville's metre remains unemphatic the contrast between this stanza and the two previous is quite obvious. It provides a transition between the sweetness of the octave, which can now be seen as having been purposefully established to make this contrast the more striking, and the vulgarity of the couplet. In that couplet not only is Caelica alluded to as "common" in the most unflattering way, but the garden of Eden itself has become "a common field": Greville's meaning couldn't be plainer.

This poem illustrates my point about style precisely: Greville's insistence here on describing unflinchingly Caelica's depravity determines his choice of style, because the sweetness of the poem's first two stanzas only makes the extremely plain condemnation at the end more forceful. Greville is not willing to give Caelica the benefit of the doubt. He has seen her behaviour and, without excusing his own, condemns her as "common." Greville's elegance, as I have

also said earlier, is accuracy; and he could hardly be more accurate than he is here.

This poem has a companion poem, XXXIX. They have the same theme, their couplets say almost precisely the same thing, and they have almost the same procedure:

> The pride of Flesh by reach of humane wit,
> Did purpose once to ouer-reach the skye;
> And where before God drown'd the world for it,
> Yet Babylon it built up, not to dye.
>
> God knew these fooles how foolishly they wrought,
> That Destiny with Policy would breake;
> Straight none could tell his fellow what he thought,
> Their tongues were chang'd, & men not taught to speake;
>
> So I that heauenly peace would comprehend,
> In mortall seat of Caelica's faire heart,
> To babylon myself there, did intend,
> With naturall kindnesse, and with passions art;
> But when I thought my selfe of her selfe free,
> All's chang'd: she vnderstands all men but me.

Joan Rees says that this poem's language "plays characteristically between secular and religious references" (155). I'm not sure why she says "characteristically," since this sort of "play" is more characteristic of Donne than of Greville, who seldom indulges in it; but she is right to observe it in this poem. What Greville does here is to borrow one of the most famous stories of the Old Testament, interpret it in a way that suits the analogy he wants to draw, and then draw that analogy, in this case between the builders of the Tower of Babel and himself in his relation to Caelica. Because the Biblical story is given such an odd twist by Greville in this poem, and because this poem is, I think, the most interesting of the group of six I have brought together,

I would like first to consider the original story, then Greville's use of it, and finally the point he makes with his idiosyncratic interpretation of that story and the analogy that he then draws.

The story is found in Genesis 11:1-9.

> 1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.
> 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.
> 3 And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime they had for morter.
> 4 And they said, Go to, let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven: and let us make a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.
> 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man builded.
> 6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.
> 7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language,
> that they may not understand one another's speech.
> 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.
> 9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

The interpretation Greville gives to the action of the men and the judgement of God is clearly not the most obvious one. In this account, the men of Babel decide to build the tower to "make a name, lest [they] be scattered"; their intention is to unify mankind by creating a monument to themselves. And God's reason (if that word can be used in this context) for scattering them and confounding their language is to

"restrain" them from things "which they have imagined to do," because, the Biblical account leads us to believe, God sees the building of the tower as a sign that man has become too powerful. The God of this account, as so often in the Old Testament, is a jealous one, jealous here of His creatures' abilities and potential.

Greville's poem interprets these events quite differently. To begin with, in the first stanza of the poem the men of Babel are not even mentioned. Typically, Greville universalizes the story by attributing the impetus to build the tower to "The pride of Flesh." And specifically what this "pride of Flesh" means to achieve by building the tower is "not to dye"; in Greville's account, then, the men want not unity but, as he phrases it, immortality at least as a people.

And the God of Greville's poem can certainly not be accused of jealousy or fear, as the God of the Biblical account might. Greville emphasizes God's intellectual as well as His moral superiority with the double use of "fool": "God knew these fooles how foolishly they wrought." So here Greville both exalts God and denigrates the men, who, for all their ambitions, are fools who do foolish things. And what they want to do, according to Greville, is no less than to "breake" "Destiny with Policie": "They thought they could change their place in the order of things by exercising craft" (Rees 155). This attempt to upset hierarchical order is indicated even in the first stanza, where the attempt is to

"ouer-reach," not just the sky, but their station in life. So, in Greville's reading of the story, God does not fear His creatures' power and so disable them; He simply gives them a nudge, though a disabling one, to remind them of His power and their puniness. And Greville's account of this judgement is powerfully enacted in one word: "Straight." Such is the speed of God's just judgement.

This then is the original account and Greville's interpretation of it. What is most interesting is Greville's analogical use of his version of the story. To begin with, this poem, like so many of Greville's, is rationally ordered. The octave relates a story to be used as the basis for an analogy, and the sestet (beginning with "So") draws that analogy. Just as the men of Babel tried to overreach themselves, to move above their stations, so Greville, who wanted to know the "heauenly peace" in what he acknowledges to be the "mortall seat" of Caelica's heart (by opposing "mortal" here to "heauenly" he is already judging his own actions), is obviously overreaching himself. Before considering exactly what happens to him, however, I would like to look at the precise meanings of two words crucial to both the original and Greville's account: "Babel" and "Babylon."

The Jerusalem Bible says that "Babel is derived here from a verb meaning 'to confuse,' but in fact the name means 'gate of the god'" (15n.). OED adds that the word is "not referable to any known Semitic root." And of the word "babble," which

is obviously a secondary meaning here, OED says "No direct connexion with Babel can be traced; though association with that may have affected the senses." And finally, for the use of "babylon" as a verb, OED cites only one text--Greville's poem. The dictionary cites lines ten and eleven in support of its definition of "to babylon" as "To place or establish in a magnificent abode." What the lexicographer does not note is that this nonce use of the word depends heavily upon a play on "babble on." It is to the play in the poem on the words "Babylon," "babylon," "comprehend," and "understand" that I would now like to turn.

Why did Greville use the Biblical story? I believe he had two reasons. The first, and I think the less important, is to exploit the possibilities of the wordplay I have noted above. The second, more important one is to enable himself to indicate (as he does in his opposition of "heavenly peace" with "mortal seat") that he knows that he is doing wrong, and on two levels: he is doing wrong by aspiring to the love of Caelica, who, we are led to believe in this and other poems, either is above him or believes herself above him, which can amount to the same thing; and he is doing wrong by looking for "heauenly peace" on earth. It is this second sort of wrongdoing that he recognizes and rejects in LXXIV, "Farewell sweet Boy"; in that poem he turns finally from secular to divine love. But much earlier in the sequence Greville already demonstrates his awareness that to place too much

faith in degenerate humanity--here as so often represented by the fickle and faithless Caelica--is to deserve punishment.

But the wordplay is there, and it is an important part of the poem (and says something about the poem's style, as I will argue a little later). First of all, we can see clearly in the second stanza of the poem what can be seen in many other of Greville's works: his belief that speech is best used for the straightforward communication of thought. In his Treatie of Humane Learning, Greville says that "those words in euery tongue are best, / Which doe most properly expresse the thought" (stanza 109); in this poem, he describes the effects of God's confusing of languages as "none could tell his fellow what he thought." No man could understand his fellow, that is, could comprehend what he was saying. These are the words Greville uses, in different senses, in the poem's sestet. In line nine, Greville wants to "comprehend" heavenly peace. "Comprehend" here probably means "to lay hold of with the mind or the senses"; OED helpfully cites a definition given by Donne in one of his sermons: "To comprehend is to know a thing as well as that thing can be known." In this way, we might say that the men of Babel, in Greville's account, wanted to "comprehend" heavenly peace as well, by building a tower that would take them to heaven.

In the poem's eleventh line we find Greville's singular use of "babylon." I suggest that the play on "babble on" is unavoidable here, not only because of the many references to

speech and confusion in the poem, but also because of the means by which Greville plans to "babylon" himself in Caelica's heart: "With naturall kindnesse, and with passions art." "Passions art" must refer to rhetoric, to the words he will use to persuade her of his love; "art" is opposed to "naturall" to point to the difference between feeling and saying, between being and claiming. So by "babbling on," Greville hopes to secure himself a place in Caelica's heart.

But, as the couplet tells us, Greville's fate is even more personally upsetting than that of any of the men of Babel. Just at the point when he thought he was "free of" Caelica (as Thom Gunn notes, this expression, which Greville uses a number of times in Caelica, means "admitted to the privileges of" [65n.]--just as he was admitted to [or at least "had part" of] "every fruit and flower" of her "garden" in the previous poem), he finds that "All's chang'd." This sudden change, described and enacted in the strong iamb that begins the line, corresponds exactly to the "Straight none" of line seven. In both places the "judgement" occurs instantaneously, and that judgement is enacted in the metre, which in this last line demands a stress on "All's" almost equal to that on "chang'd," and which thus slows up the line and points to the opposition heralded by the "But" that begins the couplet. Here, as I have said, Greville's punishment is worse than that of the men in the Biblical story. There, "none could tell his fellow what he thought"; here, Caelica "vnderstands all men

but" Greville. So it is from her "understanding" that the poet is barred. This brings me to the last element in the sonnet's wordplay.

OED gives several definitions that suggest the kind of second meaning that I suspect Greville intends to give "understand" in this line. It can mean "to have knowledge of" (and, of course, "to know" is a loaded verb in the Bible, with its frequent meaning of "have sexual intercourse with"); it can mean "to be in agreement or collusion; to be confederates"; and in an archaic usage, it can even mean "to conceive" (with the possible double meaning of that verb, too). Now, in the pattern of words about speech and confusion of speech that Greville has established in this poem, "understand" obviously means, first of all, "to comprehend." I believe, however, that especially after having understood the last poem, in which Greville spends the night in the sort of "heauenly peace" he only hopes to attain and finally and briefly thinks he has attained in this poem, we must concede the sexual innuendo present in his indictment of Caelica's "understanding" of all other men.

Greville, then, here uses a sacred story to make a profane point. Although the couplet of this poem is not so obviously contemptuous as was that of the previous one, its accusation is almost exactly the same: whereas he once thought Caelica his alone, she is now "open" to all men.[13] These two poems together make strongly the point I have claimed most of

Greville's love poems make at least implicitly: if Greville allows himself to be subject to degenerate mankind in the person of the woman he loves, how much lower is he then than even that woman?

I would like to look in detail at only one more of the three poems that remain in the group of six I've been considering, and to say a few words about the others at the same time. Here is LXIV:

> Caelica, when I did see you euery day,
> I saw so many worths so well vnited,
> As in this vnion while but one did play,
> All others eyes both wondred and delighted:
>
> Whence I conceau'd you of some heauenly mould,
> Since Loue, and Vertue, noble Fame and Pleasure,
> Containe in one no earthly metall could,
> Such enemies are flesh, and blood to measure.
>
> And since my fall, though I now onely see
> Your back, while all the world beholds your face,
> This shadow still shewes miracles to me,
> And still I thinke your heart a heauenly place:
> For what before was fill'd by me alone,
> I now discerne hath roome for euery one.

This apparent poem of praise contains a surprise in its couplet, and especially in its last line. Until then, there is nothing in the poem that suggests that the poet will turn from the inflated praise of the first two stanzas to the precise but devastating accusation of that line. The third stanza, far from undercutting the praise of the first two, actually extends it by saying that even Caelica's back shows forth the miracles he had formerly apprehended by gazing at her face, and that stanza's last line seems to be the admiring declaration of a lover who, even when rejected, can see and

praise the virtues of his beloved. (Of course, once we have seen the opposition in the other poems in this group between "I" and "all" ["all men," "all the world"], this stanza's first and second lines seem a bit less straightforwardly complimentary.) But the couplet shows the poem to be a rather different one from what it had seemed. That couplet, however, does not overturn the rest of the poem, but supports it.

C.Q. Drummond, in his essay "Disproportion in the Poetry of Sidney and Donne," points out that in many of the poems by those two poets that are most often praised, the poet uses the couplet (in the case of sonnets) or the end of the poem (in the case of other forms) to change the point of the whole poem; the "disproportion" of his title is that between the poem's subject and its theme. What Greville does here, however, is to construct his poem in such a way that, once read, it seems always to have been leading up to the point about Caelica that is eventually made: the subject and the theme, then, are not here disproportionate. Greville is able to do this because his style, by this point in the sequence, enables him to balance the praise of the three quatrains against the censure of the couplet without ever obviously moving from one style to the other. I would like to look at a few features of this, Greville's mature style, to demonstrate my meaning.

To begin with, the style of the entire poem, couplet included, is what I think must be called "noticeably

unnoticeable," to return to Cunningham's phrase. It is direct but graceful, clear but delicate. In the first two stanzas, each line is end-stopped; while this obvious division of lines is usually a feature associated with the plain style, in this case the lines each represent not only a unit of thought but also a clear unit of syntax. The first line begins with the direct address to "Caelica," and continues with a "when" clause; the second line, beginning "I saw," fulfills the "when"; the third line begins with "As," Greville's variant of "that," which begins the second part of the "when" statement; and the fourth line completes the sense of the sentence. The second stanza works in much the same way, the single sentence that composes it beginning with a "Whence" clause (that is, "For this reason"), continuing with the reason ("Since . . ."), and ending with the generalized statement that supports the reason.

The third stanza varies the pattern of the first two with a strong enjambment in the first two lines--"I onely see / Your backe"--and begins and ends with a repeated "And," a repetition that makes the poet's protestations, apparently those of admiration in the face of adversity, more insistent: "And since my fall / And still I thinke." So the poem's regular iambic metre and end-stopped lines (the exceptions to the first of these being the feminine endings of lines two, four, six, and eight and the inverted feet in lines one and five, and to the second lines nine and ten) actually

contribute to the natural voice of the poem. Greville's artifice, that is, hides his art.

And the same thing happens in the couplet, whose condemnation is a refinement of that in the couplet of XXXVIII--"While that fine soyle, which all these ioyes did yeeld, / By broken fence is prou'd a common field"--but which says almost exactly the same thing, using the metaphor of the "openness" of heaven instead of the "open" garden. The measured and reasonable tone of LXIV's couplet is very different from the contemptuous and passionate one of XXXVIII's, and is perhaps even more effective. In the earlier poem, Caelica's garden is "prou'd" a common field, so that all the joys of her "soyle" are available to all men (she herself, the word probably also suggests, is thus "soiled"); in this poem, the "heaven" of her heart has room for all, but the focus is on the poet's "discerning" of this fact, and his discerning, and his confining of the description of his joys in this poem to the ones of the spirit, makes his contempt for her more justifiable. Here he looks down on her, as it were, from a greater height.

And of course the sexual innuendo of the couplet is undeniable. Although the last line of the third stanza explicitly names Caelica's heart as the heavenly place, the couplet itself is careful not to specify that part--it is called only "what": "For what before was fill'd by me alone . . . ." Given the earlier poems' suggestions of the poet's

possible sexual intimacy with Caelica, the circumlocution of "what" must make us ask "What, other than the woman's heart, might once have been 'fill'd' by Greville alone?" And the most vulgar but clearly possible answer to that question makes both the accusation of the last line, and the measured, reserved, passionless, and even gentlemanly "I now discern" all the more remarkable.[14] What Greville might have said, were he less gentlemanly, is "I see that you are a vicious whore." And this sort of reservedly expressed but nonetheless fierce condemnation makes the poem a very different thing from what it first seemed to be, and yet supports the tone that Greville has so carefully created throughout by means of the stylistic felicities that I have described.

I believe, then, that in this poem Greville's style appears at its most mature, but in the service of what is probably a petty intention: to denigrate the woman he once loved. But even in that denigration is the secondary suggestion that Greville is himself, in some way, even more contemptible than Caelica. After all, in this poem as in many others he admits that he equated her with heaven, that he all but worshipped her; in the third stanza he even talks about his "fall." And, as I have said, while in Donne this sort of very nearly blasphemous analogy is commonplace, in Greville (pace Rees) it is fairly uncommon, and is always meant seriously: Greville always knows he does wrong when he worships a woman instead of God. And in poems like this one

and most of the others in the group I have been discussing, our understanding of the poem is indistinguishable from our assent to that implied contention: if we comprehend the poem, we comprehend as well the feeling Greville has created and communicated through the poem, and we must, I think, feel that this feeling is the proper one. And here, as is usual in Greville, that feeling is one of personal depravity. We may, then, wish to give Greville the benefit of the doubt: his intention may not be so petty as I suggest. His own degradation is so clearly acknowledged in these poems that perhaps he means, not simply to denigrate his mistress, but to arrive at an accurate moral judgement of her and of himself--and this intention is certainly not a petty one.

Before I move on to the last sort of poems I want to discuss here, the political poems, I will conclude my discussion of Greville's love poems by looking at the best of them, if this can be called a "love poem" at all, since it constitutes a rejection of the love that has preoccupied the poet for most of the sequence. That poem, which marks the "turn" in Caelica, is LXXXIV:

> Farewell sweet Boy, complaine not of my truth;
> Thy Mother lou'd thee not with more deuotion;
> For to thy Boyes play I gaue all my youth,
> Yong Master, I did hope for your promotion.
>
> While some sought Honours, Princes thoughts obseruing,
> Many woo'd Fame, the child of paine and anguish,
> Others iudg'd inward good a chiefe deseruing,
> I in thy wanton Visions ioy'd to languish.
>
> I bow'd not to thy image for succession,
> Nor bound thy bow to shoot reformed kindnesse,

> Thy playes of hope and feare were my confession,
> The spectacles to my life was thy blindnesse;
> But Cupid now farewell, I will goe play me,
> With thoughts that please me lesse, & lesse betray me.

In this poem Greville takes up many of the terms of his earlier love poems, especially those addressed to Cupid. And while he acknowledges here the benefits, real and imagined, that he derived from his "worship" of Cupid, his devotion to earthly love, he finally turns decisively from the thoughts proper to the service of that god to those appropriate to the real God. Greville's rejection of Cupid is extremely moving because of his honesty, and that honesty is the product of the style he has been developing and which I have been describing.

That honesty leads him in this poem to assess honestly his earlier devotion, and to make clear that that devotion was given willingly and was apparently pleasant: "I in thy wanton Visions ioy'd to languish" is an emphatically self-condemning line that displays an acute understanding of the dangers of following the pleasant course instead of the proper one. His metre helps him make his point all the stronger: the strongest metrical stress in the line falls on the most damning word--"ioy'd." While "some," "Many," and "Others" actively pursue honour, fame, or goodness, Greville languishes--that is, passively wastes away and pines--and takes great pleasure ("ioy'd") in doing so. He also makes clear that he cannot have been denied the "promotion" he hoped for because of any slackness in his service, "For to thy Boyes play I gaue all

my youth"; nor did he serve Cupid for any merely practical (and thus, in the hierarchy of perverted values he now attributes to earthly love, lesser) reason: "I bow'd not to thy image for succession, / Nor bound thy bow to shoot reformed kindnesse."[18] Finally, he mentions for the last time Cupid's blindness (as I have pointed out earlier, this is one Petrarchan convention for which Greville seemed to find many uses), but this time, instead of complaining that he has given Cupid his own sight, he accurately describes the state of a lover who can see only with eyes affected by love: "The spectacles to my life was thy blindnesse." He has loved Cupid, followed him, changed his own religion--"Thy playes of hope and feare were my confession [that is, creed]"--but has profited in no way. So it is not only some new devotion to virtue or discovery of the true God (Greville is not afraid to admit) that has decided him to turn from earthly love, but also a life of servitude without reward. And his honesty appears most profoundly in the couplet, where he addresses Cupid for the last time and turns decisively from him, while still acknowledging that he is turning from an apparently greater pleasure to an apparently lesser one: "But Cupid now farewell, I will goe play me, / With thoughts that please me lesse, & lesse betray me." His admission that earthly love is pleasant, perhaps even more apparently pleasant than the contemplation of higher love, is one that, I believe, Greville alone is capable of.

Only two poems after this one, Greville will write the justly famous line "Life is a Top which whipping Sorrow driueth." This is the kind of thought, the realization provided by the contemplation of truth rather than pleasure, to which he has turned in LXXXIV. Compared to many of the thoughts he has had--thoughts of Caelica's eyes, lips, breasts, thoughts of his amorous conquests, thoughts of the many pleasures of love--this kind of thought will obviously please him less. But that it will less betray him is equally obvious, given the many betrayals enumerated in the first eighty-three poems of the sequence. The poems that follow this one in Caelica are generally much better than most of the earlier ones, just as LXXXIV is a better love poem than any other in the sequence. And the later ones are better because Greville's mature style is capable now of handling greater subjects. As a user and subverter of Petrarchan commonplaces and neo-Platonic conceits Greville is skilled, but as a devotional poet searching for the assurance of his salvation and the means of expressing his understanding of it he is masterly.

In his introduction to Poems and Dramas of Fulke Greville, First Lord Brooke (1939) Geoffrey Bullough very usefully categorizes the poems in Caelica and gives the number of poems in each of his categories. After listing the love poems, he says that "Nine poems are definitely political"

(34). If "political" means "of or affecting the State or its government; of public affairs," then I think there are ten and maybe eleven political poems in the sequence, as well as several that begin by talking about politics only to use it as an analogy to support a claim about love or religion." I would like to discuss a few of those political poems here, and suggest to what extent my hypothesis about Greville's consciousness of depravity and the effect that consciousness had on his mature style is borne out in these poems.

The first purely political poem in the sequence, a poem that demonstrates the sort of difficulties Greville's compression of thought into as few lines as possible can present, and which illustrates as well the style that sometimes leads him to such compression, is LXXVII.

> The Heathen Gods finite in Power, Wit, Birth,
> Yet worshipped for their good deeds to men,
> At first kept Stations betweene heauen, and earth,
> Alike iust to the Castle, and the Denne;
> Creation, Merit, Nature duly weighed,
> And yet, in show, no rule, but will obeyed.
>
> Till time, and selfnesse, which turne worth to Arts,
> Loue into complements, and things to thought,
> Found out new Circles to enthrall Mens hearts
> By Lawes; wherein while Thrones seeme ouerwrought,
> Power finely hath surpriz'd this faith of man,
> And tax'd his freedome at more than he can.
>
> For to the Scepters Iudges Lawes reserue
> As well the practicke, as expounding sense,
> From which no Innocence can painlesse swerue,
> They being Engines of Omnipotence:
> With equall showes, then is not humble man
> Here finely tax'd at much more than he can?
>
> Our moderne Tyrants, by more grosse ascent,
> Although they found distinction in the State
> Of Church, Law, Custome, Peoples gouernment,

Mediums (at least) to giue excesse a rate
Yet fatally haue tri'd to change this frame
And, make Will law, Mans wholesome lawes but name.

For when Power once hath trod this path of Might,
And found how Place aduantagiously extended
Waines, or confoundeth all Inferiors right
With thinne lines hardly seene, but neuer ended;
It straight drownes in this gulf of vast affections,
Faith, truth, worth, law, all popular protections.

This poem falls into two parts. The first, made up of the first three stanzas, describes the heathen gods and their immediate inferiors, the ancient rulers. The second, and more pointed, is made up of the last two stanzas, and deals with "Our moderne Tyrants," Greville's attitude to whom is clear from the second half of that line, "by more grosse ascent." Although Thom Gunn and Joan Rees provide helpful notes to the more obscure lines, the poem seems to demand paraphrase: The heathen gods were just to all men, even though they apparently had no law but their own wills. Eventually, however, selfishness prompted man's rulers to invent laws that they alone could transcend, and man's freedom was thus severely restricted. And judges always bow to the monarch, who thus has absolute power over men who are theoretically equal to him, because supposedly bound by the same laws. Modern tyrants, even cruder in their ambitions, when restricted by the wholesome rule of customs, the laws of the church, and common law, try to eliminate these restrictions and once again bend law only to their own wills. Once a monarch sees how his position will allow him over time to impinge more and more on the rights of his subjects, however, he will be overthrown by

the supremacy of natural law.

As even my paraphrase suggests, the poem is full of interesting claims. And Greville's style is at most points adequate to his subject, although this is, I believe, not one of his best poems. Its inferiority is due to one of the several disadvantages of the compression I will discuss in a moment: the poet is interested here far more in advancing an argument about the evils of absolute monarchy than in enacting that judgement through his verse. So, while the great religious poems are also packed with thought, Greville has invested them with more, quite literally, of his soul. Most of the political poems seem almost exclusively intellectual.

In these poems, for example, Greville's wish to say as much as concisely as possible often leads to awkwardnesses in his metre, several instances of which are obvious in this poem's first stanza. The first line contains a trochee in the third position followed by an awkward elision in the fourth ("finite in power"), while the second line, perfectly regular, depends on the pronunciation of every syllable in "worshipped" for that regularity. A similar defect can be seen in lines three and four. Because stress within any foot is relative, "between" in line three probably need not be pronounced with the heaviest stress on the first syllable (even though "be" is the strongly stressed syllable within its foot); the heavy stress demanded by the elided "heaven" allows the weakly stressed syllable "-tween" to be more strongly stressed than

"be." In fact, this effect is an interesting one, if not, I think, very successful; and combined with the odd inversion necessary in the second foot of line four, it is not successful at all. Read as regular iambic feet, the first three words of line four make immediate sense--"just" will then mean "only," since the stress will fall on "to." But the sense here demands that the second foot be inverted, because "just" here is <u>not</u> an adverb meaning "only" but an adjective meaning "fair." My point, then, is that there is in each line in this first quatrain an irregularity or at least an oddity (in which class I put the diaeresis on the third syllable of "worshipped": although the extra stress on the "-ed" ending is not unusual in two-syllable words, it is much rarer in three-syllable words), and one that does nothing to improve either the grace or the accuracy of the lines--with the possible exception of the secondary point made, in line one's inverted foot "finite," that the true God (never mentioned in this poem, of course) is infinite.

Similar awkwardnesses exist throughout the poem, but I don't mean to exaggerate the damage that they do; I want only to suggest that they indicate Greville's preoccupation here with matter at the expense of manner. And his matter is indeed weighty, as is his compass: he deals with heathen gods, heathen rulers, and modern "tyrants," all in thirty lines. And just as his aim in most of the love poems is to condemn woman's fickleness and his own foolish depravity in worshiping

her, and in all the religious poems to denigrate humanity and exalt God, so here as in most of his political poems Greville's aim is to indict man's rulers, and to suggest that, as this poem might fairly be said to claim, power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely. What makes this, the first political poem in Caelica, unique is that it has a hopeful ending: the absolutely corrupted monarch will eventually find himself overwhelmed by the forces of natural law--"Faith, truth, worth, law, all popular protections." This assertion is unusual in Greville, who, as Gunn points out, can be seen in the later Treatie of Humane Learning "advocating terror as a political expedient in the unified authoritarian state" (32). Here is stanza 92, which Gunn cites in support of this assertion (I quote it from Bullough's edition):

> Therefore, as shadowes of those Lawes diuine,
> They must assist Church-censure, punish Error,
> Since when, from Order, Nature would decline,
> There is no other natiue cure but terror;
> By Discipline, to keepe the Doctrine free,
> That Faith and Power still relatives may be.

Although this stanza does not necessarily contradict Greville's position at the end of Caelica LXXVII, neither do the two pieces seem comfortably compatible. He has mentioned the church in the second-to-last stanza as one of the "Mediums" that can limit the monarch's excesses, and he names "Faith" as the first of the "popular protections" that will overthrow the corrupt monarch. But his later advocacy of the "natiue cure" of "terror"--which I take to mean the

magistrate's threat of punishment or death--shows Greville to be still concerned with the depth of human depravity. While "Faith, truth, [and] worth" are the first three "popular protections" he names in the poem's last line, the protection that takes the greatest rhetorical and metrical stress is the final one: "law." Depraved man must make rules to control his fellows--and his tyrants.

While this poem has in common with his religious poems and many of his love poem's Greville's wish to investigate the reasons for and consequences of human depravity, it does so in a style akin to that of the later Treaties rather than to that of the best poems in Caelica. The lines are full of technical philosophical and political terms, and these terms conduce to precision but not to the communication of the poet's attitude toward--his feelings about--the matters he discusses. In poems like this one Greville comes closest to being the kind of poet he is most often accused of being: a versifier of intellectual problems.

Sonnet XLIX is a love poem that makes a political statement as well:

> Princes, who haue (they say) no minde, but thought,
> Whose vertue is their Pleasure, and their end,
> That kindnes, which in their hearts neuer wrought,
> They like in others, and will praise a Friend.
>
> Cupid, who, People say, is bold with blindnesse,
> Free of excesse, and enemy to measure,
> Yet glories in the reuerence of kindnesse,
> In silent-trembling eloquence hath pleasure.
>
> Princes wee comprehend, and can delight,
> We praise them for the truth they neuer had;

But Cupids wayes are farre more infinite,
Kisses at times, and curt'sies make him glad:
Then Myra give me leaue for Cupids sake,
To kisse thee oft, that I may curt'sie make.

This poem is the most trivial one I will discuss in this chapter. But it is interesting because of the waste of the potentially rich subject proposed in the first line; the assertion about princes is wasted on an analogy with Cupid, which is itself turned to an embarrassing bit of Petrarchan foolishness in the couplet, a foolishness reminiscent of (and perhaps based upon) Sidney's Astrophil and Stella 63, in which Stella's double refusal of Astrophil becomes a double negative, and, as Astrophil delights in pointing out, "in one speech two negatives affirm." Here, Greville pretends to worry about how to please Cupid, decides that "Kisses at times, and curt'sies make him glad," and on that basis asks Myra to allow him to kiss her often, so that he "may curt'sie make."

Interesting as well is the characterization of Cupid in the second stanza. Thirty-four poems intervene between this one and LXXXIV, Greville's rejection of Cupid, but here as so often Greville shows himself aware of the dangers of following the ways of this false god. Cupid is "enemy to measure," Greville acknowledges, and this realization alone ought to make an intelligent man shun him. But Greville hedges his bets here, as he did in the poem's first line: "People say" these things about Cupid, just as "they say" these libelous things about princes in the first stanza. So Greville manages

to condemn Cupid, but at one remove. While in his great poems he speaks directly to the reader, communicating a hard-won truth and persuading the reader of its importance, here he is simply playing at condemning both princes and Cupid. The last two lines of the second stanza, however, are a nice description of the sorts of things that please Love, or those in love: pleasure comes from "silent-trembling eloquence." This well-drawn picture of the pleading and anxious lover is the best thing about the poem.

I have chosen to glance at this poem even though it is a poor one because it exemplifies in small the problem I am arguing that Greville has with most of his political poems --what almost seems to be a lack of conviction. Here, the political statement is thrown away in favour of a trivial pleasantry about love. But in those poems that use, for example, religious analogies to discuss love, Greville is never at ease; he uses the vehicle of his metaphor to condemn his own or others' actions. In this poem, the potentially interesting vehicle is simply abandoned.

Although the assertion about princes is wasted here, it is exploited to a degree in other of the political poems in the sequence. The claim here is that princes have "no minde, but thought"--that is, that they have no principles to guide them, but follow their transient desires--and that their "vertue is their Pleasure, and their end" (that is, their goal, and what they call "vertue," is nothing but their own

pleasure). In CI, Greville takes up the second of these points: "But States grow old, when Princes turne away / From Honour, to take pleasure for their ends"; and in LXXVII, which I've already discussed, Greville points to the bad example set by the heathen gods, both to their own kings and to "moderne Tyrants," because, just though they were, to all appearances they "no rule, but will obeyed." These accusations are serious ones, and worth examining; in the poem we have just looked at, they are discarded in favour of amorous buffoonery.

XCI is a political poem that turns toward the religious. It comes only six poems before the great religious poems I have discussed, and is part of a bridge between the earlier political poems and the later religious ones, just as LXXXIV constitutes the bridge between the love poems and the religious poems. Here is XCI:

> Rewards of earth, Nobilitie and Fame,
> To senses Glorie, and to conscience woe,
> How little be you, for so great a name?
> Yet lesse is he with men that thinks you so.
> For earthly Power, that stands by fleshly wit,
> Hath banish'd that Truth, which should gouerne it.
>
> Nobilitie, Powers golden fetter is,
> Wherewith wise Kings subjection doe adorne,
> To make man thinke her heauy yoke, a blisse,
> Because it makes him more than he was borne.
> Yet still a slaue, dimm'd by mists of a Crowne,
> Lest he should see, what riseth, what puls downe.
>
> Fame, that is but good words of euill deeds,
> Begotten by the harme we haue, or doe,
> Greatest farre off, least euer where it breeds,
> We both with dangers and disquiet wooe.
> And in our flesh (the vanities false glasse)
> We thus deceau'd adore these Calues of brasse.

This poem's subject is very like that of the poem we've just

looked at, but while the last one depended on partial particulars (the "Princes" are not named, though Cupid is), this one depends on generalizations, and especially on characterizations of the abstractions "Nobilitie" and "Fame." The organization of the poem is characteristic of Greville: the first stanza names the two subjects and condemns them as a unit, and each of the next two stanzas condemns one subject specifically. Of the two together Greville says that "earthly Power" insists that they be glorified, when they are in fact only "Rewards of earth" that bring glory to the senses but woe to the conscience. In the second stanza he takes up nobility, and dismisses it as nothing but "Powers golden fetter"; the quatrain of the third stanza, climactically, defines fame as "but good words of euill deeds." The couplet of the third stanza then sums up man's devotion to these two intangible but attractive concepts, and equates it with the Israelites' devotion to their "Calues of brasse." The poem is concise, precise, clear, and, on its own terms, practically unanswerable. It is a credit to Greville's style that we are hard pressed for arguments against him; his precision makes his definitions and judgements seem complete, and the clarity of his style suggests that the poet has told us just what we need to know about the subjects. The poem, at least in its effect, is broadly syllogistic. If we accept the premises, which here are the characterizations of nobility and fame, we must accept the concluding analogy and thus the poet's

judgement of these subjects.

The main characteristic of style that encourages us to assent to the judgements of the poem is its definitiveness, its ability to define the subjects without quite seeming to be doing so. For example, the first words of the poem already incline us to Greville's conclusion. Before even naming the subjects "Nobilitie and Fame," he is already limiting them by calling them "Rewards of earth." The same thing happens in the first line of each of the other two stanzas, but here Greville is more direct: he uses the copula in a rhetorically strong position in each. In "Nobilitie, Powers golden fetter is," the copula appears at the end of the line, the strong stress that its position requires further reinforcing the appositive definition of nobility as "Powers golden fetter." And in "Fame, that is but good words of euill deeds," although "is" is weakly stressed, the adverb "but," which is not only the strongly stressed syllable in its foot but which also gets a little more stress in its position following the initial strong inverted foot, emphasizes the exclusiveness of the damning definition that that "is" introduces. By stressing the definitions or characterizations of each of these qualities in turn, Greville's style allows him to persuade his reader to agree with those definitions, and thus to accept Greville's conclusion.

I might also mention here the way in which Greville's mixed diction shows him to be incorporating both the plain and

the sweet styles into his own. From the tradition of the plain style he gets such words as "woe," "banish'd," "truth," "fetter," "heauy yoke," "slaue," "good" and "euill," "dangers and disquiet," and "deceau'd"; from that of the sweet, "Glorie," "golden," and "blisse." His metre also partakes of some of the characteristics of both styles. Line two, for example, with its balanced account of the "Rewards of earth" as "to senses Glorie, and to conscience woe" and the heavy stresses on the nouns, might almost have been written by Gascoigne, while the easy grace of lines nine and ten, despite their plain statement, are obvious heirs to Sidney's refinements of the iambic pentameter line.

And all these features of Greville's style are finally put to the service of the intention that becomes increasingly obvious and pressing the further we read in Caelica: to abase the behaviour and institutions of man and simultaneously to exalt God, His works, and His ways. So this poem, as I have said, ends with an analogy that points directly toward the ultimate rejection of all the works of man that Greville finds necessary for his salvation in the religious poems to come. The couplet of this poem even contains a tentative version of the great "mirror of transgression" that figures so importantly in several of those religious poems. Here, man's flesh is "the vanities false glasse," which shows us exaggerated reflections of nobility and fame, making them seem far more desirable than they are--just as the apostate

Israelites' "Calues of brasse" were superficially more attractive than the true beauties of their God.

I have said that XCIX is the best of the religious poems and LXXXIV the best of the love poems, and I think that XCI is the best of the political poems. It is not so good as either of these others, though, and I think that's because of the problem I suggested with the political poems in general: it is in them that Greville's style tends to an excess of intellection at the notable expense of emotion. This is probably a danger inherent in the subject. Although people are apt to be passionate about party politics, the sort of political theory that Greville creates in his poems on the subject is largely abstract and theoretical. This last poem is one of the few political ones in which Greville's style is used to best advantage to convey quite clearly--though largely through the formal means I have suggested--the poet's feeling about the subject. Normally, though, religion and love are the subjects that call forth in their contemplation the profoundest emotions, and that is certainly the case in Greville's poems, although again more so with the subject of religion than of love. The most heartfelt love poem, as I have suggested, is the one in which Greville actually turns from love. We feel the pain of his decision, but his style--which is never better than in such lines as "I in thy wanton Visions ioy'd to languish"--persuades us that he is right to decide as he does, and persuades us as well that that decision

is rightly so called: it is a moral and intellectual choice, not a vagary.

While my argument about the development of Greville's style may seem to depend on what I have admitted to be an uncertain claim about the order of composition of the poems, all I have really argued is that it is later in Caelica rather than earlier that Greville finds his true subject. His search for evidence of his salvation, which occupies him most obviously in XCVII, XCVIII, and XCIX, is conducted through the poems themselves (they are truly "forms of discovery"), and I don't think it is inaccurate for me to say, as I have insisted earlier, that upon Greville's achieving the precise style to deal with this subject depends his soul. That is, to put it in more immediately reasonable terms (if one will for a moment accede to the requirements of Calvinistic Protestantism), Greville must find some assurance of his salvation, but find it without prejudicing the case either in his favour or against himself. While he certainly cannot make himself appear better than he is (a poet unconcerned with truth, for example, might write a poem where his election was certain from the first, and that certainty based upon claims about his own sanctity that God might dispute--Donne, as I will argue, is in some of his poems such a poet, and even Herbert is in danger of becoming one on rare occasions), neither may he portray himself without proof as the "chief of sinners," if I may borrow part of Bunyan's great title.

Rather, the poet who would sincerely explore the problem of the state of his soul must bring to bear on that problem all his intelligence, and must honestly assess (within the framework of his own religious beliefs) his relationship with God. This Greville does in the first three poems in the group of four I discussed earlier, and in the third of those poems he attains, after a great deal of suffering, suffering palpable to the reader who comprehends the poem, to salvation: "Thus hath his death rais'd up this soul of mine." Compared with this plain statement, most (though not all) of Donne's and Herbert's similar assurances seem facile or at least too easily attained. And that is because the poets' styles were, most of the time, inadequate to the magnitude of their subject.

But Greville, I believe, finally attains a style adequate to the examination of the greatest subject of all. That style, the one upon which depends his salvation, is plain to the extent that at no point do we feel (as we so often do with Donne) that any word, any construction, any feature of syntax or rhythm, exists for any reason other than to make clearer the minutiae of the poet's understanding of his subject. It is eloquent in its very plainness; to quote once again from the Treatie of Humane Learning, Greville's words truly are "sparks . . . of those fires they strike." Greville's repetition of many of his terms in the late religious poems gives those terms at the same time a range of meaning and a

precision that can be evoked only by their use in a creative context. Wesley Trimpi says of the plain style that

> the denotative and the connotative most nearly approach each other in the exclusion of irrelevant associations from the context. The denotative statement defines the writer's experience so sharply that it will not admit further qualification other than his attitude toward the experience, which will itself be the context. Connotation,then, can only be perceived by an act of understanding, of insight into what the writer is saying about his experience and about his attitude toward it. (ix)

The plain style Trimpi is specifically discussing here is the classical plain style of Ben Jonson. I believe that Greville too writes in what we might call the classical plain style, although a different one from Jonson's. Like Jonson's, Greville's style evolves from an early and uncomfortable combination of the two main styles of sixteenth-century English poetry, the plain and the sweet--a combination, as I have demonstrated, that often finds the two styles juxtaposed in the same poem, and not always to good effect--into a coherent style that seems never to be conscious of borrowing from the other two, but that retains the clarity, seriousness, and precision of the plain style while achieving, largely as a result of these qualities, a grace that is reminiscent of the sweet style's. It is the style that Greville needed to develop to say the things he had to say in the way they had to be said.

Notes

1 Throughout this chapter I will refer to Caelica as a "sequence," and will talk about "earlier" and "later" poems. The dating of Caelica as a whole, let alone of individual poems (with a few well-documented exceptions), is of course wholly conjectural. I believe that two kinds of internal evidence strongly suggest that Caelica is a sequence, or at least, as Geoffrey Bullough thinks, "substantially presented in the order in which it was written" (37): the change and general improvement in style from beginning to end, and the turn from love to politics and religion as subjects of the poems after LXXXIV. I will argue implicitly and occasionally explicitly for this belief throughout the chapter. For discussions of the problem of dating Greville's works, see Croll 7 - 17 and especially Bullough 23 - 42. Bullough says that "Evidence of style and thought also suggests (broadly) a chronological arrangement" (36), and Croll speaks of "The sequence called Caelica"; Gunn dissents, comparing Caelica to Sidney's sonnet sequence and concluding that "Caelica is neither a sequence nor mainly sonnets" (45n.)

2 I take over Yvor Winters' title, admittedly without being certain that I am doing him full justice in my appropriation: to

his great book I am indebted for my subject, my theme, and many of my terms.

3 See, for example, Paradise Lost III 103 - 106, where God defends Himself:

> Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere
> Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
> Where only what they needs must do, appear'd,
> Not what they would?

4 For a clear discussion of what constitutes "rational" and "logical" form, see Drummond, "What is Rational Form in Poetry?", especially 68-69.

5 I realize that this punctuation cannot confidently be attributed to Greville. Whenever I make a point about punctuation, and I seldom do, the syntax of the lines supports (at least by modern standards) roughly the punctuation of the text. This is the case here, where each of the first two quatrains, whatever its terminal punctuation, stands as a unit of thought distinct from the refrain.

6 Here is what Drummond says about Jonson's epigram:

> Jonson thus sets for his style a far more important task than do most poets for theirs, than do even most devotional poets: if the details of style of this poem fail to create the feeling of contrition, Jonson is committing the very sin he hopes to be acknowledging and for which he is hoping absolution ("Belief and Poetic Structure" 85).

I will argue this point with respect to Greville later in this chapter, and with respect to Herbert and Donne in later chapters.

7 Danielson's account is, I believe, simply ingenious, and does not account for all the details of the poem.

8 I owe this point to C.Q. Drummond. Greville's understanding of his situation relative to God at this point is so subtle and complex that only the subtle and complex style that Greville has developed through the writing of Caelica could indicate this sort of grammatical inclination.

9 The hendecasyllabic line so characteristic of Greville is used in 59 of the 109 poems in Caelica, and this frequency signals quite a departure from late sixteenth-century metrical practice; in Sidney, to make an obvious comparison, feminine endings are comparatively rare, though other variations and modulations abound.

Of the 50 poems in Caelica that do not contain eleven-syllable lines, eleven are not pentameter to begin with, so the percentage of poems whose regular pentameter is varied with at least one hendecasyllabic line is even higher: 59 out of 98. (If VI, which is an attempt at classical metre but which can be read in iambic hendecasyllables with a five-syllable refrain, is included, the figure rises to 60 out of 98.)

10 The term "feminine ending" has little if anything to do with the traditional attribution of strength to man and gracefulness to woman. Here is OED: "Feminine rime: in French versification, one ending in a 'mute e' (so called because the mute e is used as a feminine suffix); hence in wider sense, a rime of

two syllables of which the second is unstressed." My point, I admit, makes free with the usual meaning of "feminine."

In XVIII Greville uses the same metrical effect--the first and third lines of the poem's last stanza end on the weakly stressed "her." In that stanza, however, Caelica is speaking and Greville reporting her censure of him; the effect is to make Greville sound almost contemptuous, a tone borne out in the couplet.

11 Here are the five lines that decline to praise her goodness:

> How all this is but a faire Inne
> Of fairer guest, which dwells within,
> Of whose high praise, and praisefull blisse,
> Goodnes the penne, heaven paper is,
> The inke immortall fame dooth lende (139-43).

12 Joan Rees says in a note about the different women named in the poems "Three women's names are mentioned in the sequence, Caelica, Myra and Cynthia, but whether they denote three different women, or one under different names, or whether any real woman was intended at all, we do not know" (17). I can add nothing to this summary of general ignorance, because I share it: I can find no evidence in the poems to support any certain claim for one of the possibilities Rees lists.

13 I use this word in allusion to Donne's use of it in the couplet of his Holy Sonnet XVIII ("Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so bright and clear"): the Church, says Donne to God, "is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then / When she'is embrac'd and open to most men." "Open" here, as A.J. Smith notes (637n.), has

the disturbing secondary sense "available to the largest number of males."

14 "Discern" means "to separate (things, or one thing from another) as distinct; to distinguish and divide." So here Greville distinguishes between himself and "euery one." But "discern" is also the root of "discerning," which means "quick in intellectual perception; penetrating." I think this may be Greville's self-deprecating joke: he is praising himself for (finally) noticing not only that he is no longer Caelica's favourite, but that every other man is.

15 Bullough (277-78) is probably right about the meaning of the first of these lines--"He did not worship love merely to have children"--but his gloss of line ten I find too obscure to be probable: "Nor use Love's other arrows (of hate) for persecution; an allusion to the persecution of the reformers under Mary, etc." Based on the definitions, both available to Greville, of "kindness" as "a feeling of tenderness or fondness; affection, love," and "reformed" as "altered in form or content," I believe the line (which has caused so much confusion because it is so compact, and so demands a lengthy paraphrase if one is attempted) says approximately this: "Nor did I try to use your bow [and the arrows that cause love] to regain the love of one who loved me once but has fallen out of love with me." This interpretation has the advantage of being congruous with the rest of the poem (whereas Bullough's depends on a political statement that seems incongruous

with the rest of the lines) and of supporting Greville's claim that he was disappointed in love.

16 The political poems are, I think, LXXVII, LXXIX, LXXXI, XC, XCI, XCII, XCV, CI, CVI, CVIII, and perhaps LXXXIII; those that use politics only as an analogy for love are XXX, XXXVI, and XLIX. If Jeffrey Goodman is right, LXXX is also a political poem, and not one about different kinds of poets, as common opinion has maintained.

Chapter III

Typical and Anomalous Styles in the Poems of Herbert

> About this time I took an opportunity to break my mind to an ancient Christian, and told him all my case; I told him, also, that I was afraid that I had sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost; and he told me he thought so too. Here, therefore, I had but cold comfort; but, talking a little more with him, I found him, though a good man, a stranger to much combat with the devil. Wherefore, I went to God again, as well as I could, for mercy still.
> (par. 180)

This is Bunyan in Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, his spiritual autobiography. If we cast Greville as Bunyan and George Herbert as the "ancient Christian" in this described conversation, we have, I believe, an accurate figure for the difference between the two poets. On the evidence of his best poetry, Greville seems always to be in fear of God, always to be examining himself for evidence of election or of reprobation; Herbert, except in a few poems, seems truly, "though a good man, a stranger to much combat with the devil." This is the basis, I believe, for Yvor Winters' objection to Herbert's "infantile pietism" (Forms 81); unlike Greville, for example, or Jonson in "To Heaven," or Bunyan himself in his great books, Herbert seems in most of his poems not to be experiencing any combat with the devil, but merely reporting on his reasons for believing himself saved, telling pointed and pious stories, advocating

godly behaviour, or listing precepts of the church (most notably in "The Church-porch"). And this difference between experiencing through the poem and reporting by means of the poem explains to some extent the difference in the two poets' styles.

This brings us back to the assertion I made about Greville: while his style is a combination and modification of the plain and the sweet styles, the particular combination and modification that he effected is largely determined by his belief in man's, and specifically in his own, depravity. The poet who believes himself damned in his own actions and saved if at all only by the grace of God will hardly be anxious to exhibit human ingenuity in his poems to or about that God Who alone can save him. He will be more likely to write in a style that allows him to abase himself while still remaining in command of his intellect, and that will allow him to praise God appropriately without flattering or appearing to flatter; this, I believe, is what Greville's style allows him to do. And while Herbert occasionally asserts his belief in this kind of style and this kind of poetry--"Nor let them punish me with losse of rime, / Who plainly say, My God, My King," he asks at the end of "Jordan (I)"--seldom is he content to let his adoration of God (a quite genuine adoration) rest on those four words. More indicative of Herbert's intention in his poetry is the couplet of the first stanza of "The Church-porch": "A verse

may finde him, who a sermon flies, / And turn delight into a sacrifice." This combination of "delight" and "sacrifice" is of course another version of Sidney's description of the poem as "a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight." Herbert's substitution of "sacrifice" for "teaching," however, makes the poem serve the poet as well as the reader: while "teaching" suggests that the poet knows something the reader doesn't, "sacrifice"--meaning among other things "the offering of something . . . to a deity as an act of worship"--suggests that the poem is also an offering from both poet and reader, and so serves a double function. I believe this is an accurate manifesto for Herbert: while most of his poems are far more than versified sermons, they are written to instruct the reader as well as to please God.

And Herbert's belief that he does have something to teach the reader cannot but influence his style. While Greville's poetry can also be said to teach, it does so by example and by compelling the reader to travel along with the poet in his discovery of his own state of sin and, finally, of salvation; as I said in my previous chapter, to read Greville properly is to make this journey of discovery with him. Herbert's poetry, though, for the most part teaches either by setting forth precepts of the church or moral instructions directly--"Abstain wholly, or wed" (13); "Drinke not the third glasse" (25); "Art thou a Magistrate? then be severe" (85) (all from "The Church-porch"); "Who is the honest man?

/ He that doth still and strongly good pursue, / To God, his neighbour, and himself most true" ("Constancie" 1-3); "Man calleth thee his wealth, who made thee rich; / And while he digs out thee, falls in the ditch" ("Avarice" 13-14); "Welcome deare feast of Lent: who loves not thee, / He loves not Temperance, or Authoritie" ("Lent" 1-2)--or, more commonly, in the poems that are addressed to God, by his own reported example or by asking God to do that which every man should ask God to do: "Yet Lord, instruct us so to die, / That all these dyings may be life in death" ("Mortification" 35-36); "I joy, deare Mother, when I view / Thy perfect lineaments, and hue / Both sweet and bright" ("The British Church" 1-3); "J E S U is in my heart, his sacred name / Is deeply carved there" ("JESU" 1-2); and, perhaps most famously, "But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde / At every word, / Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child: / And I reply'd, My Lord" ("The Collar" 33-36). Only in a few cases does Herbert seem to discover through the writing of a poem exactly what he needs to say about his subject; but it is in the poems where he does so, I will argue, that we can see Herbert's best style, the style most appropriate to the subject he has chosen to the exclusion of all others. I would like to begin by examining those poems that I believe to be true "forms of discovery," and then proceed to those poems that typify Herbert's procedure and style. I hope that the superiority of the first group to the second will become

clear in the course of this discussion.

Here is "Jordan (1)."

Who sayes that fictions onely and false hair
Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?
Is all good structure in a winding stair?
May no lines passe, except they do their dutie
  Not to a true, but painted chair?

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves
And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines?
Must purling streams refresh a lovers loves?
Must all be vail'd, while he that reades, divines,
  Catching the sense at two removes?

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:
Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime:
I envie no mans nightingale or spring;
Nor let them punish me with losse of rime,
  Who plainly say, My God, My King.

While this poem's sequel, "Jordan (II)," is often discussed as a "sacred parody" of the first poem in Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, it seems not to have been noticed that "Jordan (I)" is almost certainly a reworking of Astrophil and Stella 3. Because the way in which Herbert makes over Sidney's poem demonstrates Herbert's ability not only to adapt a poem's basic plan to a new subject, but also to adapt his own style to that subject, I would like to quote Sidney's sonnet and then discuss the two together.

Let daintie wits crie on the Sisters nine,
That bravely maskt, their fancies may be told:
Or Pindare's Apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,
Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold:
  Or else let them in statelier glorie shine,
Ennobling new found Tropes with problemes old:
Or with strange similies enrich each line,
Of herbes or beastes, which Ind or Afrike hold.
  For me in sooth, no Muse but one I know:
  Phrases and Problemes from my reach do grow,
And strange things cost too deare for my poore sprites.
  How then? even thus: in Stella's face I reed,

What Love and Beautie be, then all my deed
But Copying is, what in her Nature writes.

When the two poems are set side by side, the similarity between them makes Herbert's dependence on Sidney's poem as a model for "Jordan (I)" seem more than likely. Both poems are recitals of various kinds of poetry, all of which are rejected in favour of the simplest kind of praise that each poet can think of: for Sidney, it is a plain "copying" of Stella's love and beauty, which were placed there by nature; for Herbert, it is four basic words of adoration: "My God, My King." (Even this simple naming of what is adored Herbert may have borrowed from Sidney; in Astrophil and Stella 16, Astrophil praises his beloved's absoluteness by saying "Stella; now she is nam'd, need more be said?") And both poems reject the other kinds of poetry with some contempt. Sidney's "daintie wits" and "Pindare's Apes" "crie" and "flaunt," while Herbert's "false hair," "winding stair," "painted chair," and "course-spunne lines" make clear his low opinion of certain kinds of verse. Both poets do, however, seem willing to blame themselves for their inability to write these kinds of poems, although that blame is turned to the praise of Stella and of God respectively. Sidney admits that "strange things cost too deare for my poore sprites," and Herbert tolerantly says "Shepherds are honest people; let them sing: /. . . / I envie no mans nightingale or spring" before he admits to the sort of plainness that he fears may be "punished" with "lack of rime" (that is, that may be

considered "unpoetical"--as Greville's plainness so often is).

But with these many similarities, the poems are finally very different. The aim of Sidney's is to praise Stella, and of Herbert's to praise God and by extension to suggest that the style in which he does so is the one in which all such praise ought to be written. So the end of Herbert's poem, an end succesfully achieved, alone might make it a better poem than Sidney's, other things being equal. I agree in this claim with Yvor Winters, who says

> If a poem, in so far as it is good, represents the comprehension on a moral plane of a given experience, it is only fair to add that some experiences offer very slight difficulties and some very great, and that the poem will be the most valuable, which, granted it achieves formal perfection, represents the most difficult victory.
>
> (Defense 25)

Sidney's poem certainly "represents the comprehension on a moral plane of a given experience," as does Herbert's. In Sidney's case, the experience is that of love for Stella, and Sidney's comprehension of that love leads him to discuss the style in which that love may be described. Herbert's experience is his adoration of God and his wish to write about that adoration, and his exploration of the problem of style is correspondingly more profound than Sidney's, and his conclusion is more satisfying.

The beginning of this poem is uncharacteristic of Herbert. The speaker of most of his poems is humble and unassuming, but this poem's speaker begins by challenging

authority: "Who sayes that fictions onely and false hair / Become a verse?" While in most of his poems Herbert advocates God and piety as subjects implicitly, here he demands attention to his contrariness. The poem then goes on to describe several different kinds of poetry and suggest that if they are legitimate then so is the kind that he proposes. In a lovely and sweet line, for example, he characterizes the sweet style: "Must purling streams refresh a lovers loves?" And he admits pastoral poetry--"Shepherds are honest people; let them sing: / . . . / I envie no mans nightingale or spring"--and questions the necessity of allegory: "Must all be vail'd, while he that reades, divines, / Catching the sense at two removes?" It is his tolerance of these other kinds of poetry (even, presumably, occasional poetry written to honour the king or queen, although he seems scornful of it at the end of the first stanza: "May no lines passe, except they do their dutie / Not to a true, but painted chair [that is, a throne]?") that allows him to ask that he be allowed to write the sort of poetry he claims for himself: "Nor let them punish me with losse of rime, / Who plainly say, "My God, My King."

Both Herbert's and Sidney's poems are to some extent contrived-- that is, they are to some extent only elaborations of the compliment that each poet wants to make at the end of each poem. But Sidney's poem is more obviously so contrived, and suffers more from the contrivance--as do

many of his poems. His style itself gives him and his intention away. While Herbert takes care to suit his style to his meaning in each line of "Jordan (I)"--this is one of those poems that, like many of Greville's early ones, change styles from line to line--Sidney's poem is sweet throughout, and of a sweetness that might best be called ornate. When Sidney gently condemns "Pindare's Apes" for "Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold," his own language does the same: like that of Pindar's imitator's, his language is self-consciously ornamental for the sake of ornament. And even when he's admitting his own inability--an admission that, after all, we know to be false, but that he must make for his purposes in this poem--to write the sort of poetry he's been dismissing, he does so in a line full of alliteration and assonance: "And strange things cost too deare for my poore sprites." So his final claim, that all he does is "copy" what nature "writes" in Stella, is obviously false, even in the context of the one poem that goes so far to prove it true; and the falsehood of the conclusion is not improved by the efforts made in the rest of the poem.

Herbert's poem is much more honest, and its conclusion develops much more logically from the rest of the poem. Following Donne, Herbert sets this poem in the imaginary context of a discussion or even an argument; and for all we know, the context may not be imaginary at all. We can easily

imagine Herbert being chided by a friend for writing all his poems about only one subject. The interlocutor, imaginary or otherwise, might have claimed that "the poet . . . nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth" (Sidney 97)--that is, that the poet writes only fictions--and this claim would provoke exactly the response that Herbert gives us, a response that begins by taking issue with the claim, continues with a series of questions that hint at the insufficiency of the various kinds of poetic "fictions" to be found in other poets' works, and ends by asserting Herbert's right to write the sort of poetry that he wanted to write. (I am not, incidentally, suggesting that Sidney is Herbert's imaginary disputant, despite my quotation above from his Defence of Poetry. Sidney at another point in the Defence seems to agree with Herbert's choice of subject. Following his famous definition of poetry as "an art of imitation," he says

> Of this have been three several kinds. The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God. . . . Against these none will speak that hath the Holy Ghost in due holy reverence. (86)

This claim seems to contradict his later one about the poet's "never affirming.")

As I said earlier, Herbert suits his style in this poem to his changing subjects. When he is claiming the primacy of the plain style, his lines are plain: "Is there in truth no beautie? / Is all good structure in a winding stair?"

When he wants to demonstrate and dismiss the sweet style in the same line, he asks "Must purling streams refresh a lovers loves?", a line that means nothing except in its demonstration of the vacuousness of which the sweet style is often guilty, but which, like good sweet style poetry, is lovely in its meaninglessness. And he can juxtapose the styles to good effect, as in the first two lines of the second stanza: "Is it no verse, except enchanted groves / And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines?"

Finally, the conclusion of Herbert's poem makes his point eloquently and plainly, and with the very words that he claims to want to use to the exclusion of ornate language or pastoral disguise. This poem has only suggested Herbert's usual subject-- in its "truth" and "true . . . chair" [God's throne]--so that when he depicts himself in the last line as a poet who wants to do no more than "plainly say, "My God, My King," those words come as a surprise and as a revelation: the simple form of adoration is indeed the most powerful and affecting statement in the poem, and its power makes Herbert's claim for the kind of poetry it typifies a strong one. Thus, while Herbert's conclusion is obviously in his mind as he writes the poem, the process by which he arrives at it is an honest one, and it works honestly upon the reader. This is one of Herbert's best poems just for that reason.

A similarly good poem is "Discipline":

Throw away thy rod,
Throw away thy wrath:
O my God,
Take the gentle path.

For my hearts desire
Unto thine is bent:
I aspire
To a full consent.

Not a word or look
I affect to own,
But by book,
And thy book alone.

Though I fail, I weep:
Though I halt in pace,
Yet I creep
To the throne of grace.

Then let wrath remove;
Love will do the deed:
For with love
Stonie hearts will bleed.

Love is swift of foot;
Love's a man of warre,
And can shoot,
And can hit from farre.

Who can scape his bow?
That which wrought on thee,
Brought thee low,
Needs must work on me.

Throw away thy rod;
Though man frailties hath,
Thou art God:
Throw away thy wrath.

This poem begins by making a request of God, goes on to give reasons why God should honour that request, and ends with a new understanding of God, one that makes the request even more reasonable. That understanding, which the poet arrives at through the writing of the poem, makes this poem one of Herbert's best and most moving. In the final reason it gives

to persuade (if that can possibly be the right word) God to do what the poet asks of Him, it is very like "Jordan (I)": the only reason, the poet realizes, that need be given is the acknowledgement, the naming, of Him of whom he makes his request: "Thou art God." What the poet learns through the poem is that all his own "righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), and it is the absoluteness of the realization that makes the simple conclusion of the poem so effective. The poem is really a prayer that allows Herbert to clarify his own attitude, and to persuade himself of the truth of what he discovers.

And Herbert has written the poem in a style, and has used a structure, that enforce the simplicity and precision of that conclusion. A poem that implores God to be gentle rather than wrathful might best be written in a "gentle," or sweet, style, as this poem is. When Ben Jonson, to make an obvious comparison, writes "A Hymn to God the Father" imploring God to be stern, the poem's style is very different from that of Herbert's poem, though the song-structure is similar. I quote the first two stanzas of Jonson's poem:

Hear me, O God!
  A broken heart
  Is my best part;
Use still thy rod,
  That I may prove
  Therein thy love.

If thou hadst not
  Been stern to me,
  But left me free,
I had forgot
  Myself and thee.

(127)

This is not even Jonson's usual classical plain style; this is the native plain style. This poem might almost have been written by Ralegh or Gascoigne, or even Skelton. This style is the best suited to the kind of plea Jonson wants to make; compare Donne's similar request at the end of "Goodfriday, 1613:"

> O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou mayst know mee, and I'll turne my face.
> (337)

While Donne, like Jonson, begs God to punish him, this plea comes as only the last in a series of explanations for Donne's riding westward on Good Friday, and is cheapened by its display of the poet's cleverness. And while Donne's style in these lines is plain, too, it is plain with the affected roughness so characteristic of Donne: the sensationalism of "Burne off my rusts, and my deformity" lessens the emotional honesty of the very plain "thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee," which says very much what Jonson's "Use still thy rod" gets said in six fewer syllables--Donne's "thinke mee worth thine anger" is, after all, redundant, for God would not punish a man He did <u>not</u> believe to be worth His anger, as Jonson knows.

My point about the difference between Jonson's style and Donne's, and between theirs and Herbert's, is that each poet realizes that the style must suit the subject. Donne, I

believe, still makes the wrong choices in his lines, but Jonson and Herbert make the correct ones. Herbert's hymn is sweet , but not ornamentally sweet: the sixfold repetition of the "th" sound in the first stanza, for example, is graceful to the extent that it softens the expected harshness of "wrath," but not to the extent that it draws attention to the manner from the matter. Similarly, while the rhythm of the poem is also graceful and the tone itself gentle, Herbert uses few words normally associated with the sweet style, and many plain, monosyllabic words. It is the sense of the words and the mellifluousness of the syntax that make the poem sweet and Herbert's plea both humble and lovely.

And the plea itself is not a hollow one. While by the end of the poem the poet realizes that the only reason he can or need give for God to be gentle is the acknowledgement of God Himself, the first reason Herbert gives is about the best that man can give:

> For my hearts desire
> Unto thine is bent:
> I aspire
> To a full consent.

"Consent" here means, above all else, "ecclesiastical communion" (OED): Herbert wants full communion with God. And just as Milton in his sonnet on his blindness claims that his soul is "bent / To serve . . . [his] Maker" (168), so Herbert's heart's desire is "bent," that is, inclined or disposed, to God's own. If any human reason can be given for God to throw away his rod, this is probably it: the human

soul wants only what God wants. And Herbert's style here supports his claim. The conjunction "For" is given strong stress by its initial position in the line, and the rhyming words are rationally connected: the "desire" of Herbert's heart is also what he "aspires" to, and he is literally "bent" on "consent"--communion--with God.

After working through his own reasons, and turning in the fifth stanza from the "wrath" that he implores God to throw away to the "love" that wrought on God the Son and thus must work on Herbert, the poet repeats his initial plea, but enforces it with his new understanding, which acknowledges as well his own failings:

> Throw away thy rod;
> Though man frailties hath,
> Thou art God:
> Throw away thy wrath.

The strong stresses forced by the metre upon the first and last syllables of the declaration "Thou art God" make this plain statement, and the understanding it represents, almost breathtaking. It resembles in sense if not in form Greville's profoundly moving

> Depriu'd of humane graces, not diuine,
> Thus hath his death rais'd up this soule of mine.

Like Greville at the end of his poem, Herbert here recognizes the sufficiency of God, and that his prayer is answered even in the form of the asking. This poem is Herbert's best example of what he advocates in "Jordan (I)": the conclusion creates its power by plainly saying "<u>My God, My King</u>" in its

own way--"Thou art God."

"Love (III)" is more contrived than either of the two I have so far discussed, but is nonetheless a poem in which something is discovered by the reader if not by the poet.

> Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
> Guiltie of dust and sinne.
> But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
> From my first entrance in,
> Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
> If I lack'd any thing.
>
> A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
> Love said, You shall be he.
> I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
> I cannot look on thee.
> Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
> Who made the eyes but I?
>
> Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
> Go where it doth deserve.
> And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
> My deare, then I will serve.
> You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
> So I did sit and eat.

This is the last poem in The Temple, and, like the last poem in Caelica, it shows the poet secure in his own salvation (Herbert, admittedly, still more smugly so than Greville), having worked through his own sinfulness in many ways, and preparing to enjoy eternal life. Greville's "Rather, sweet Iesus, fill vp time and come, / To yeeld the sinne her euerlasting doome" is hardly so pleasant as "So I did sit and eat," but his call for the apocalypse is no less a sign that he believes himself saved. The difference is that Greville has attained to some assurance of his personal salvation ten poems earlier, and is in his last poem concerned with the state and the fate of the world; Herbert, however, chooses

to conclude his book with a poem both describing and enacting the beauty of a single soul's acceptance into heaven.

The poem dramatizes Herbert's achievement of the "full consent" to which he aspired in "Discipline." But even when he is welcomed by Love, by God, he draws back, and the poem documents his various arguments for his own insufficiency. This, of course, is the Christian paradox: the soul most worthy can never believe itself to be so, because one of its virtues is humility. So Herbert argues that he is an unworthy guest, that he is "Guiltie of dust and sinne," "unkinde, ungratefull," and unable to look on God. Love's rebuttal is simple and Scriptural: the sacrifice of Christ, "who bore the blame," redeems Herbert and makes him a worthy guest: "You shall be he." When Herbert resists to the very end, wanting to serve rather than to be served, Love insists: "You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat." The ascending strength of the stresses on the first four words of this line makes Herbert's point: God's will is inexorable. And the poet's acquiescence is glorious in its simplicity, a simplicity enforced by the emotional force of his acquiescence: "So I did sit and eat."

This poem invites comparison in style and procedure with an inferior one, "The Holdfast."

> I threatned to observe the strict decree
> Of my deare God with all my power & might.
> But I was told by one, it could not be;
> Yet I might trust in God to be my light.
>
> Then will I trust, said I, in him alone.

Nay, ev'n to trust in him, was also his:
We must confesse, that nothing is our own.
Then I confesse that he my succour is:

But to have nought is ours, not to confesse
That we have nought. I stood amaz'd at this,
Much troubled, till I heard a friend expresse,
That all things were more ours by being his.
What Adam had, and forfeited for all,
Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall.

Like "Love (III)," this poem shows us the naive poet learning a lesson about God; and like that of "Love (III)" this poem's conclusion provides a reassurance of God's omnipotence. But here Herbert gets his effect cheaply. The initial interlocutor of this poem (the "one" of line 3) is annoyingly smug; he contradicts Herbert as he proposes pious works, but does so in a way that allows him to make more errors that can then be corrected. So the poor confused poet proposes one course of action after another, only to be told that each of his proposals arrogates to himself something that is God's alone. Finally, after "one" has, presumably, abandoned the "amaz'd" poet, "a friend" comes along to set him on the right track. What is most annoying, of course, about these two interlocutors is that they are inventions of Herbert: what Herbert does in this poem is to cast the reader as the speaker and, through the two personae, himself as "one" and "a friend." By proposing apparently reasonable ways of following God and then cleverly demonstrating their unsuitability, Herbert leads us through a series of mistakes to the moral at the end, which shows that all that worry was

unnecessary anyway: "Christ . . . cannot fail or fall." His procedure in "Love (III)," while contrived in a similar way, presents a speaker who seems genuinely to be learning, who is obviously Herbert himself as he understands the subject he is dealing with. There is no condescension in Love's tone as there is in that of the "one" of "The Holdfast," and the ending is a profoundly personal one, very little like the pious truism that ends "The Holdfast."

And the style of each poem is congruous with each one's procedure. The hyperbolic "threatned" that introduces the subject of "The Holdfast" sets the tone of the poem as well: the speaker is to be portrayed as desperate and a bit wild. And in the creation of this tone Herbert is occasionally careless of his meaning. How, for example, might one "observe" a "decree" with "all [one's] power & might"? And why could it not be that one intent on observing God's decree should at least try to do so? And can Herbert really mean that we oughtn't trust in God? He means to answer that question in the poem's conclusion--"all things were more ours by being his"--but the answer is unsatisfactory because of the contrivances by which it has been arrived at. The poem's style is in collusion with these contrivances: it has the affected roughness so often found in Donne, most clearly visible in the awkward metre--"Of my deare God," "But to have nought . . . / That we have nought"--that draws attention to itself, and in the almost prosaic syntax that is the syntax

of undistinguished expository prose: "But I was told by one . . ./ . . . / Then will I trust, said I . . . / Nay, ev'n to trust in him, was also his." The repetitions of the important words "trust," "confesse," and "nought" damage rather than improve the poem's coherence; the sing-song of "We must confesse that nothing is our own. / Then I confesse that he my succour is" seems to show us a Herbert not very interested in what he's saying. And, as I suggested earlier, what makes the poem's tone even worse is that it is the reader who is meant to take the place of the speaker, only to be corrected by Herbert in his guise of "one."

The style of "Love (II)," however, conforms to Herbert's own prescription at the end of "Jordan (II)": "There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd: / Copie out onely that, and save expense." What he means, and what he demonstrates in "Love (III)," is that some subjects, properly handled, will dictate their own proper styles. Love--either the quality or, as in this poem, the personification of God--dictates a style that is sweet, but not simply ornamentally sweet: it is a style capable of capturing in a line so plain as the last one of this poem something of the bliss of acceptance into Heaven : "So I did sit and eat." While the poem is cast as a dialogue, there is none of the affected roughness that we find in "The Holdfast;" Herbert's metre here is graceful, and allows him to emphasize, but gently, his most important points, as at the end of the second and beginning of the

third stanza:

> Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
> Who made the eyes but I?
>
> Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them.

The emphases in the second of these lines make Love's point strongly. When Herbert objects that he is not fit to look on Love, Love replies in terms that can hardly be denied: He made those very eyes. Still the poet can object, but only after acknowledging, in a near-spondee, Love's point: "Truth Lord"; then he emphasizes his own culpability: "but I have **marr'd** them." But these emphases, as I say, are not disruptive to the grace of the metre; they work with it. Joan Bennett says "Love (III)" is "the most perfect of Herbert's poems" (67), and, while I think there is one better, "Love (III)" is a very good poem indeed, mainly because Herbert's command of his style is here equal to his understanding of his subject.

My last example in this section of my discussion is "Church-monuments."

> While that my soul repairs to her devotion,
> Here I intombe my flesh, that it betimes
> May take acquaintance of this heap of dust;
> To which the blast of deaths incessant motion,
> Fed with the exhalation of our crimes,
> Drives all at last. Therefore I gladly trust
>
> My bodie to this school, that it may learn
> To spell his elements, and finde his birth
> Written in dustie heraldrie and lines:
> Which dissolution sure doth best discern,
> Comparing dust with dust, and earth with earth.
> These laugh at Jeat, and Marble put for signes,
>
> To sever the good fellowship of dust,
> And spoil the meeting. What shall point out them,
> When they shall bow, and kneel, and fall down flat

> To kisse those heaps, which now they have in trust?
> Deare flesh, while I do pray, learn here thy stemme
> And true descent; that when thou shalt grow fat,
>
> And wanton in thy cravings, thou mayest know,
> That flesh is but the glasse, which holds the dust
> That measures all our time; which also shall
> Be crumbled into dust. Mark here below
> How tame these ashes are, how free from lust,
> That thou mayst fit thy self against thy fall.

Yvor Winters says of this poem that "the writing . . . is as nearly perfect as writing will ever be" (Function of Criticism 62). Helen Vendler disagrees, however, and does so in a tone that suggests she is more interested in ridiculing Winters than in understanding Herbert: "Poetry is more than the exquisite statement in rhyme of what everyone knows, though Yvor Winters, in praising Church-monuments as Herbert's greatest poem, seems to have taken this as his definition of poetry" (197). Vendler here demonstrates her unwillingness to agree with Winters on even one judgement, and as a result slights Herbert. First of all, if she believes Herbert in "Church-monuments" to be simply stating "what everyone knows," she is quite missing the personal force that the poem gives to such striking figures as "flesh is but the glasse, which holds the dust / That measures all our time"--and she is missing as well the intensely personal phrasing of such figures. Introducing a reading by J. V. Cunningham in 1974, Kenneth Fields says this:

> One of the features of his [Cunningham's] style, sometimes called the plain style, is that the reader may say, "Ah, I seem to be speaking this poem myself;" and at the end of many of Cunningham's poems one says, "But I wouldn't say that."

This is what we see in "Church-monuments." Herbert here is writing in the plain style, though more Jonson's classical plain style than the native plain style, and Fields is accurate in pointing out the way in which that style is "shareable" but also private: there is nothing that can be called idiosyncratic in the poem, but there is a voice that is not ours, that invests truths with the weight of Herbert's intelligence and experience and so enforces our understanding of them. And his medium is poetry, here the skilfully managed iambic pentameter line, because it is in poetry that both the subtlest understanding of an experience and the emotions that attend that experience and its understanding can be conveyed. Having said that, I quote Vendler's other observation about this poem:

> It is understandable, given the sacredness of divine subjects, that Herbert might have initially considered his poetic vocation to consist only of decking the given, as he does in Church-monuments, but the relative shallowness of such verse, no matter how intricate and polished, made Herbert turn eventually to searching interior enquiry. (197)

I cannot understand how Vendler can describe the profoundly moving poetry of "Church-monuments" as "decking the given" (especially since she makes her point by borrowing "deck" from "Jordan (II)" even as she misses Herbert's meaning altogether), although I suspect, as I said earlier, that it is her desire to ridicule Winters that drives her to such extremes: if Winters believes this poem to be Herbert's best, Vendler must believe it one of his worst. (We might consider

as a contrast the long essay on "Vertue," a lovely but comparatively slight poem, with which Vendler begins her book about Herbert. She thinks "Vertue" one of Herbert's best poems, but in justifying this belief she overcomplicates it to such an extent that she obliterates its very real virtues.)

The truth about "Church-monuments" is that it <u>is</u> Herbert's best poem, and it is so because in it Herbert's style is most perfectly suited to his subject, and that subject is a great one. The poem is a meditation on death, and it brings to the subject a profundity of feeling that is created by the features of the style Herbert has chosen. This poem is free from his characteristic exclamations, pietisms, and varying stanza-structure. In this one poem especially, Herbert seems to have understood that constant line-length, regular rhyme, and omission of exclamations of hope or fear conduce best to reflection on a serious subject. The poem is so far from a "statement in rhyme of what everyone knows" that it is all but unparaphrasable: it is only in the poetry itself that the subject and Herbert's understanding of it can be apprehended. I might, however, point to some of the technical features that help make this poem great.

First of all, Herbert uses the word "dust" (or its variation "dustie") seven times in this twenty-four-line poem, in three of the four stanzas as a rhyme. It could almost by extension be called his subject. He keeps the word

before the reader's eye, and before his own, because it represents what he has learned from his meditation on church-monuments: the "good fellowship of dust" will eventually be complete, despite man's best efforts. The word "flesh" appears in each stanza as well, except in the second where it is replaced by "bodie." The reason is of course that it is the flesh that will "Be crumbled into dust," and that it is the understanding, and the sensuous apprehension of this understanding, that the poem gives us. Here is Philip Pain on a very closely related subject:

> Scarce do I pass a day, but that I hear
> Some one or other's dead, and to my ear
> Me thinks it is no news. But oh! did I
> Think deeply on it, what it is to die,
> My pulses all would beat, I should not be
> Drowned in this deluge of security.

Pain's poem enacts the experience of understanding one's own mortality: when others die, or even when we merely acknowledge the inevitability of our own death, we do not feel the fragility of life--we are "Drowned in [a] deluge of security." But when once we "think deeply on it, what it is to die," the response is no longer simply intellectual, but physical as well. Our whole body, our whole being, responds to the apprehension of that which is all but inapprehensible to the intellect alone. It is this experience that Herbert describes and enacts in "Church- monuments": the realization that, yes, <u>my own body</u> will some day, and quite soon, be dust. If dust and earth "laugh at Jeat, and Marble put for signes," how much more easily dissoluble is mere flesh.

At every point in the poem, Herbert makes his metre do the difficult job of conveying the precise emotion appropriate to the subject. At the end of the first stanza, for example, he delays the verb "Drives" two lines and is thus able to place even more weight on "all," the word that first makes the main point of the poem. The delay of the verb and its placement at the beginning of the line give it a fairly strong stress, that is, but its foot is still iambic, which makes the stress on "all" very strong, and helps emphasize as well the discrepancy between the stresses in the next foot and thus strengthen the stress on "last," which makes the second part of the poem's main point: at the end--"at last"--"all" will crumble into dust.

At the end of the second and beginning of the third stanza Herbert again ends a sentence in the middle of a line, and again achieves exactly the appropriate effect by doing so. Speaking of dust and earth, he says,

> These laugh at Jeat, and Marble put for signes,
> To sever the good fellowship of dust,
> And spoil the meeting.

Leaving aside for a moment the astonishing phrase "the good fellowship of dust," we might notice the effect Herbert gets by "spoiling" the last of these three lines by severing the "fellowship" of metre: he breaks the line in the middle of a foot, with the period after the weakly-stressed second syllable of "meeting" quite disrupting the metre and thus forcing attention to the claim and giving even more stress

to the question that follows, which contains an image created by the almost shocking juxtaposition of the description of ever-increasing prostration in prayer with the dissolution of the seemingly eternal jet and marble monuments placed by men to commemorate the dead:

> What shall point out them,
> When they shall bow, and kneel, and fall down flat,
> To kisse those heaps, which now they have in trust?

Corresponding to the stress on "What" is that added to "them" by the inversion of the normal word order "what shall point them out." Herbert gives to his line the accents of speech, and does so even with an inversion that the speaking voice would not be likely to use; it is the stress on the words "What" and "them" that makes the line convey the emotion corresponding to Herbert's realization, as he meditates in the graveyard, that even these monuments, though they will last millenia, will eventually crumble, and the "good fellowship of dust" will thus be restored.

The third outstanding feature of Herbert's style in this poem is its adaptation of the native plain style's characteristic use of personification. Of Herbert's use of personification in general D. J. Enright says "[t]his often occurs so quietly that we are not conscious of it as such" (188), and that seems to be almost the case here. The speaker of the poem maintains a clear distinction between his body and his soul, and throughout emphasizes their separateness. At the beginning of the poem, the soul

"repairs to her devotion" while the flesh "takes acquaintance" of the mound of earth over the grave; at the end of that stanza, the soul "gladly trust[s] / [Its] bodie to this school, that it may learn / To spell his elements, and find his birth"; and, most explicitly, at the end of the third stanza, the speaker says, "Deare flesh, while I do pray, learn here," which makes clear that while the soul does one thing, the body may do another. So, while it is odd for us to talk of a body being "personified," that is what is happening here. Also personified are "deaths incessant motion," which is "fed" and can "drive"; "dissolution," which can "discern"; dust and earth, which "laugh"; the monuments, which "at last" will "bow, and kneel, and fall down flat, / To kisse"; and even dust itself, which is credited, in the line I praised earlier, with a "good fellowship." What Herbert's style is able to do is to personify these abstractions and elements, but to do it so unobtrusively that we are never taken aback by the attribution of human actions to dust or marble. If one of the achievements of the poem is to make us not only believe but also feel that "flesh" will truly become "dust," another is to suggest that "dust" can become "flesh," at least insofar as it, and marble, and "dissolution," can do what only "flesh" can normally do.

As is the case with any great poem, and as was particularly the case in my discussion of Greville's great religious poems, to explicate or even to describe features

of the poem can be tantamount to suggesting that a paraphrase or description can provide an approximation of the experience of reading--that is, of understanding--the poem. This implicit suggestion is not correct. Vendler's description of Herbert's simply "decking the given" in "Church-monuments" makes it seem that she does not understand how poetry works, how its claim to make us think, feel, understand, and believe those things that we would unaided be incapable of can be substantiated. The complex experience of understanding "Church-monuments" cannot be described or approximated; only through the reading of the poem can the profundity of Herbert's understanding of his subject be approached. This is clearly Herbert's best poem, and also one of the great poetic meditations in English.

I may seem to be prejudicing my discussion of Herbert by beginning with those poems I think his best and proceeding to lesser ones, but I mean only to illustrate his best (and anomalous) style before his typical; and in this second section of my chapter I will select not those poems I believe his worst, except for occasional interpolated illustration, but rather his most famous ones, for it is in them that his typical style, the one for which he is commonly praised, is most easily observable. As an initial illustration of the astonishing difference between the style I have been describing and the one in which Herbert most often wrote, let

me quote the first stanza of the poem preceding "Church-monuments" in The Temple, and that of the one following it. Preceding it is "Even-song," which begins:

> Blest be the God of love,
> Who gave me eyes, and light, and power this day,
> Both to be busie, and to play.
> But much more blest be God above, . . .

And following it is this stanza, the first of "Church-musick:

> Sweetest of sweets, I thank you: when displeasure
> Did through my bodie wound my minde,
> You took me thence, and in your house of pleasure
> A daintie lodging me assign'd.

Most obvious in words like "play" and "daintie," but obvious as well in the tone, subject, and intention of each of these poems, here are two examples of Herbert's "infantile pietism." The reasonableness, as Herbert makes us feel it is, of the personification of dust and dissolution in "Church-monuments" is here replaced by the slightly embarrassing apostrophe to music and the simplicity of the hymn. Characteristic of Herbert are the varying line-lengths--not, of course, in themselves bad, except as they are used for visual or aural variation alone, rather than to enforce meaning--and the graphic variations of the beginnings of lines. Characteristic as well is the vagueness of "power . . . / Both to be busie, and to play," and the extremism of "Sweetest of sweets," which would not be a problem did Herbert not assign this superior position to other items or abstractions in other poems. One is tempted to wonder, with Helen Vendler, how the poet who wrote

"Church-monuments" could also write such poems--but that wonderment is properly directed at his descent, rather than his ascent, from that poem.

As I have said, though, I'm interested now not in such clearly bad poems, but in those for which Herbert is most often praised, and in the reasons for that praise. One of the most often anthologized of Herbert's poems is "The Pulley":

> When God at first made man,
> Having a glasse of blessings standing by;
> Let us (said he) poure on him all we can:
> Let the worlds riches, which dispersed lie,
> Contract into a span.
>
> So strength first made a way;
> Then beautie flow'd, then wisdome, honour, pleasure:
> When almost all was out, God made a stay,
> Perceiving that alone of all his treasure
> Rest in the bottome lay.
>
> For if I should (said he)
> Bestow this jewell also on my creature,
> He would adore my gifts in stead of me,
> And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
> So both should losers be.
>
> Yet let him keep the rest,
> But keep them with repining restlessnesse:
> Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,
> If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse
> May tosse him to my breast.

Let us begin with the subject and the speaker here. There is a serious problem with attempting to portray God or to put words in His mouth.

> The difficulty is obvious: perfection, quite strictly, is unportrayable, for as soon as the process of portrayal begins we, the readers, begin a corresponding, and quite involuntary and irresistible, process of translation; we translate into the terms of limitation and imperfection. Indeed, the translation in a sense is

> already effected for us, for the portrayal itself is translation. (97)

This is A. J. A. Waldock writing about Milton's God, but he could have been writing about Herbert's. Herbert means in this poem to suggest a possible reason for the weariness attendant on even a good life, and, not so incidentally, to explain God's reasoning in "creating" weariness, or "restlessnesse" as it is called here. But what he gives us is a picture of a God who is so jealous of the adoration due to Him that he withholds from man what might have been the greatest gift of all, just so that man might wearily accede to God's will if for no other reason then from exhaustion. The God depicted in this poem is about as attractive as the God who, in Book III of Paradise Lost, says of soon-to-be-fallen mankind

> So will fall
> Hee and his faithless Progeny: whose fault?
> Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
> All he could have . . . (95-98)

That Milton's God here is foreseeing the fall makes his petulance all the worse. He makes an observation, however, a few lines later, that Herbert might have done well to consider in portraying his God. Still defending himself, defending in this case his decision to create man "Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (99), Milton's God asks what He would have gained had he somehow forced Adam and Eve to worship Him:

> What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
> When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)

> Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,
> Made passive both, had serv'd necessity,
> Not mee. (107-111)

Herbert's God has not considered this problem. In this poem, He believes that weariness may be the way to catch at least some of those who do not come to Him out of goodness. If we could believe that the God depicted in this poem meant this snare for man's own good, there would be less of a problem, but Herbert has made the error of giving God the additional impetus of jealousy: "He would adore my gifts in stead of me, / And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature: / So both should losers be." It is difficult for us to see how either an omnipotent God or happy mankind could be a "loser" in this arrangement, but Herbert, theologically secure, seems not to see the problem. Like Milton in Paradise Lost, he has in this poem created a petty God.

The poem, in fact, seems almost to have been written to provide a home for the play on the two senses of "rest." Herbert clearly did not see the pettiness of the character of God in the poem; nor, apparently, did it bother him that that God is a punster: "Yet let him keep the rest, / But keep them with repining restlessnesse." What then is it that is so admired about this poem?

First of all, it is very like Donne's. Compare the last lines of the first stanza--"Let the worlds riches, which dispersed lie, / Contract into a span"--with these lines from Donne's "The Canonization": "You . . . / Who did the whole

worlds soule contract, and drove / Into the glasses of your eyes" (39-41). I suspect that Herbert borrows from Donne this startling "contraction" of something huge--"the whole worlds soule" into "the glasses of your eyes" or "the worlds riches" into "a span" [that is, "a very small extent or space"]--for both its expressive and its dramatic power. From Donne as well Herbert borrows here, as he so often does, the use of direct speech. In "The Pulley" the narrator first sets the scene--man's creation-- and then God speaks; the narrator describes the bestowal of the gifts; and then God speaks again. This technique he borrows because, in this case, his claim about the reason for man's weariness is given more weight when it is spoken by God, even by a fictional God. In this case, however, Herbert's God damages His own image as well as the poem.

And the poem is perhaps anthologized because it seems to provide a quaint example of the reliance of poets of earlier centuries on God and religion as explanations for all things. Robert Adams, in his introduction to the Herbert selections in The Norton Anthology, says this:

> As a poet, Herbert is quiet, inward, subtle, graceful, and neat. . . . he delights in using quaint devices and homely images. But his spiritual feeling is to an extraordinary degree pure and fresh and free. . . . Herbert is the poet of religious faith, of submission, of acceptance. ...Herbert is never flashy, nor even strongly dramatic . . . his poetry, from which the concept of "freshness" is rarely absent, is like the parish church--an intricate, ancient structure, rich in traditional designs, which is open for the humblest and simplest person to enter. (1324-25)

Most of these generalizations are questionable at least. But this introduction suggests the uses to which Herbert's poems are often put: they are illustrations of the piety of which he was capable, and examples of "quaint devices and homely images." But to follow the claim that "Herbert is never flashy, nor even strongly dramatic" with a selection of poems that includes "The Pulley," "The Collar," "The Altar," and "Time" is odd indeed, unless I misunderstand what could be meant by "strongly dramatic." These poems, like so many of Herbert's, depend on drama or "flashiness" (in the case of "The Altar," for example) for their effects. It is generally for the Donne-like drama in his poems that Herbert is admired, I believe, and the Norton's selection of nineteen poems (which, incidentally, does not include "Church-monuments") bears out this claim. But let me conclude this argument for now: Herbert, as Winters says, is often praised for his worst qualities, and exemplified in anthologies by his worst poems--of which "The Pulley", I believe, is one.

Another popular and frequently anthologized poem is "Redemption."

> Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,
> Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
> And make a suit unto him, to afford
> A new small-rented lease, and cancell th'old.
>
> In heaven at his manour I him sought:
> They told me there, that he was lately gone
> About some land, which he had dearly bought
> Long since on earth, to take possession.

I straight return'd, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts:
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth

Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,
Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, & died.

Robert Adams calls this a "beautifully concise sonnet" (1332); A. D. Nuttall believes it "a marvellously weird poem" (33). I can see no justification for either opinion. The poem could be called "concise"--that is, "brief but comprehensive in expression"-- only if it had a great deal to say and made effective use of the fourteen lines available. Neither is the case here; Herbert has little to say, but he invents enough matter to stretch what he says over fourteen lines. What he means to do here is to try to impress his reader. He succeeds in doing so in the poem's last line at least: "Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, & died." I believe Nuttall is correct to call this "one of the most sheerly exciting lines in all religious poetry" (34). But what he and other critics who have admired this poem do not do is to ask whether the rest of the poem justifies this exciting line, or indeed whether the creation of excitement is really what ought to be aimed for in religious poetry. Nuttall's description of the poem as "weird"--a description that surely needs justification, but for which Nuttall offers none, except to say cryptically that "the weirdness [is] at once dreamlike and technically Calvinist," an amplification I do not find helpful--seems meant as a compliment. But the poem is not

weird, and that is one good thing that can be said for it: if its aim is to impress, and possibly to teach (or at least to "turn delight into a sacrifice"), it succeeds at least partially. But it does so on a low level of intellection indeed, especially compared with "Church-monuments."

The style of the poem is, for the most part, flat: that is, it is failed plain-style verse. The failure and the flatness appear most obviously in the undistinguished and frequently clumsy metre. The first stanza is the worst:

> Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,
> Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
> And make a suit unto him, to afford
> A new small-rented lease, and cancell th'old.

In the first and third of these lines, we must either deform the normal speech stress on words or phrases or read trochees in awkward positions. The initial trochee in the first line throws more than usual stress on the first syllable of "tenant," which makes that word's second syllable weaker than normal and gives all the more stress to the monosyllable "long;" the phrase "to a rich Lord" then has two problems. We either give "to" the strong stress in its foot, creating an awkward juxtaposition of two strong stresses, or we must emphasize "a" a little more than normal stress demands; and the foot "rich Lord" brings us up short with the two relatively strong stresses that its consonants force upon it (although the foot is still iambic), and thus calls more attention to the capitalized "Lord" and makes Herbert's allegoric point, which already lacks subtlety, even more

obvious. In the third line, "unto" must be read as a trochee--which, again, calls more attention to the import of the words "unto him" than they deserve--because otherwise the stresses on the two syllables "-to" and "to" make the line sound silly: "unto him to afford."

These are the only real awkwardnesses in the poem's metre; in most lines, the metre works neither for nor against the meaning, except insofar as it calls no attention to itself and thus does not distract. The last line is an exception: the metre here is manipulated to emphasize further the point Herbert makes with his inversion. The syntax of the line demands the strongest stresses on the two actions of Christ--"said" and "died"--and on the word that emphasizes Herbert's point about the prevenience of God's grace: "straight." This line is effective indeed, and seems more so because of the mundanity of the rest of the poem's lines. Joan Bennett says, inaccurately in general but correctly in the case of this poem, that Herbert "preferred the tone of men exchanging news in the market place" (65); what she does not go on to say is that that tone, which like any tone is created by a particular style, might not be the one appropriate to the subject Herbert has chosen for his poems.

Another indication of Herbert's preoccupation with his material at the expense of his poetry is the simple narrative structure of the poem, which uses a fictional search to set up the impressive sacrifice at the end of the poem. Except

for the last line, the poem describes the speaker's actions: "I resolved," "I him sought," "I straight return'd," "Sought," "I heard," and "I him espied." And the story is told without any regard for the kind of homely accuracy common to Christ's parables: who is this speaker who looks for (and who is able to look for) his landlord in heaven, and, unsuccessful, can return thence to earth? This poem is one of those I described at the beginning of this chapter as a setting forth of an article of belief--in this case, "Christ died for our sins, and bestowed grace upon man even before he knew to ask for it"--in a form that Herbert believed palatable to those people who might read a poem though they would not sit through a sermon.

This, though, to recur to my disagreement with Helen Vendler, is not to say that even in poems like this one Herbert simply "decks the given," although that description, if it had to be used, could certainly be used more accurately of this poem than of "Church-monuments." Even in a poem of this sort, Herbert embodies the belief he wants to communicate, fleshes it out with, in this case, a narrative that leads to a conclusion that gives point to the rest of the poem. He does not "deck," but attempts to create a context of faith for, the "given." In this poem, the conclusion overreaches in meaning and style the lines that came before, but is not disproportionate: Herbert was simply, and understandably, more moved by it than by his pedestrian

narrative. While better than "The Pulley," then, this poem has little to recommend it aside from that remarkable last line.

Another of Herbert's most famous poems, and one that is much better than the last two I have discussed, is "Vertue."

> Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
> The bridall of the earth and skie:
> The dew shall weep thy fall to night;
> For thou must die.
>
> Sweet rose, whose hue angrie and brave
> Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:
> Thy root is ever in its grave,
> And thou must die.
>
> Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,
> A box where sweets compacted lie;
> My musick shows ye have your closes,
> And all must die.
>
> Onely a sweet and vertuous soul,
> Like season'd timber, never gives;
> But though the whole world turn to coal,
> Then chiefly lives.

This lovely poem uses the terms of the sweet style, one of its commonest structures (the song), and the gracefulness of metre that should accompany it, and uses them in the service of a moral claim: only virtue will save the immortal soul. From the plain style it borrows not only the moral intention, but also the appearance of a rational argument--only the appearance, though, for the last stanza is pure assertion, unsupported by anything that has come before. That stanza is intimately connected to the three preceding ones by the repeated "sweet," by the oppositional "Onely" with which it begins and which demands something before it to oppose, and

with the refrain, which is again in opposition to the three versions of it that have come before; but nothing about those three previous stanzas can make Herbert's final claim any more rationally defensible than it would have been had it stood alone. What the three previous stanzas do is to set up a context of feeling within which the last stanza's assertion seems, feels, more reasonable.

The first stanza praises the day--a spring day, as we discover in the third stanza, which tells us that spring is the season that contains "sweet dayes"--and does so beautifully, and in words and in metre designed to make us assent to the terms of that praise: "so cool, so calm, so bright, / The bridall of the earth and skie." Defining the day as the marriage of earth and sky, the perfect union--a holy one at that--of that which is above and that which is below, creates a feeling about the day, a feeling almost of reverence, which is aided by the emphases on its physical properties enforced by the sibilance of the first line and its three caesurae. That feeling is then surprisingly changed to one of sadness by the third line--surprisingly, because the line begins with "The dew," which seems, even on repeated rereadings, to be an extension of the description of the day's loveliness, until it is personified with "shall weep thy fall." The clincher of the line is "to night," which reminds us that the day, once it becomes night, is day no more--is "fallen."

The second stanza praises the rose, which is so bright that the "rash gazer" upon it must "wipe his eye." The metre here, far from mellifluous, instead emphasizes the extreme brightness of the rose: "angrie" is a strong trochee, and helps as well to place extra stress on "brave." The second line, consisting of monosyllables except for "gazer," begins with a trochee emphasized by the repetition of the "b" from the immediately preceding "brave." And the nearly spondaic "rash gazer" is emphasized as well by the rough consonant sounds that help make the line's point: part of the rose's sweetness, its strength, lies in its beauty, which is dangerous to those who aren't prepared for it. But like the beautiful day, the brilliant rose "must die."

As must the spring, which encapsulates days and roses. Here again, Herbert's metre stresses his point with the trochee on "full of": spring must be sweet, if it is "full" of other sweet things. Yet all this sweetness is of no use in the end, as the modified refrain tells us: "all must die."

Herbert begins the last stanza with a trochee to point the difference between what has come before and what is about to come: "Onely." And his faith in his claim about the soul is enforced by the stress on "never," which is created by its place after the caesura, by its audible similarity to the preceding word "timber," and by the repetition of the "v" in the word that follows it, "gives." Herbert then forces a trochee on "world turn" in the next line to make his claim

inclusive: the common phrase "whole world" here gets juxtaposed strong stresses. So he emphasizes the exclusive "Onely," the absolute "never," and the inclusive "whole world" to enforce the assertion about a sweet and virtuous soul: when spring, days, roses, and all else die, it "Then chiefly lives."

I hope by my lengthy prosodic analysis and paraphrase to have indicated at least how Herbert creates an emotional, if not an intellectual, logic in this poem. Joan Bennett is surely wrong at least about this poem when she says that "Herbert's imagery . . . works through the mind rather than the senses and the structure of his poetry is logical" (49); this poem demonstrates that he could work through the senses too. If he can move us to such an extent with his description of the beauty of the natural world and necessity of its eventual death that we believe his comforting opposition of the sweetness of the eternal soul in the last stanza, then the poem succeeds. I believe it does succeed; in this poem, Herbert's command of his style, one that borrows metre and diction from the sweet style and intention and subject from the plain, is very nearly perfect. The question I want to ask, though, is this: although this is a beautiful and moving poem, and one that perhaps convinces us that, if there is such a thing as a soul, it is the virtuous one that will live forever, is Herbert here discovering or instructing? The answer is obvious: the whole poem is

contrived to make us feel that we ought to accede to the claim of the conclusion, a conclusion that Herbert had in mind before he started to write. And it is a lesser poem than "Discipline" or "Church-monuments" not only for this reason, but partly for this reason. The style that Herbert writes so skilfully here is in the service of a lesser intention than it is in those other poems. "Virtue" is thus a good example of Herbert's characteristic style at its best, and demonstrates as well that that style was not the best in which he wrote.

The last of Herbert's poems that I would like to look at closely is "Jordan (II)."

> When first my lines of heav'nly joyes made mention,
> Such was their lustre, they did so excell,
> That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention;
> My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,
> Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
> Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.
>
> Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,
> Off'ring their service, if I were not sped:
> I often blotted what I had begunne;
> This was not quick enough, and that was dead.
> Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,
> Much lesse those joyes which trample on his head.
>
> As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,
> So did I weave my self into the sense.
> But while I bustled, I might heare a friend
> Whisper, <u>How wide is all this long pretence! There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd: Copie out onely that, and save expense</u>.

Like "Jordan (I)," this poem is a parody of one of Sidney's <u>Astrophil and Stella</u> poems--in this case, the first of that sequence. The relationship between the two poems has been amply explored by other critics; I will quote only the first

line and the couplet of Sidney's poem, so that I may compare the subject and conclusion of each:

> Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,
>
> Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,
> "Foole," said my Muse to me, "looke in thy heart and write."

Sidney means to "show" his true love in verse; Herbert's lines mention "heav'nly joyes." And Sidney's problem is solved by his Muse, who instructs him simply to look in his heart and write, while Herbert's is solved by another of his "friends," who in this case recommends that he simply copy out the sweetnesse that is inherent in love (just as, in the third sonnet in Astrophil and Stella, Astrophil discovers that in order to praise Stella he need only "copy" "what in her Nature writes"). The congruence between what each poet wishes to express in his verse and the means that are finally revealed to him is instructive here: Sidney, wishing to express love, is told to look into his heart (that is, "the mind in general, the seat of all the faculties" [Ringler 459]), where he will see "the image of Stella, which will give him all the material he needs for invention" (Ringler 459). His search must be inward, for what he wants to express is the kind of love that originates in the human faculties. Herbert, however, wishing to write of "heav'nly joyes," must look outward, to Love itself, and copy what he finds there: his subject is the love that originates with God, and which must be discovered in the intercourse between God and the

human soul.

So for Herbert, he claims in this poem, there is no point in "decking the sense, as if it were to sell." What the poem is, then, is a list of the sorts of things Herbert will not do. The success of the poem is vitiated, however, by the fact that he does do many of these things in other poems. For Herbert to pretend to condemn "Curling with metaphors a plain intention" as a technique unsuited to his kind of poetry is disingenuous. Let us take the most obvious example: allegory is extended metaphor, and in such poems as "Love (III)" and "The World"--and many others-- Herbert certainly does not disdain allegory.

And, of course, the main problem with a discovery of the sort Herbert makes at the end of this poem is that he must either make sure all his poems fall into the line prescribed here, or risk trivializing this poem. What happens is the second of these. Few of Herbert's poems simply "copy out" the "sweetness" to be found in love, any more than they "plainly say, My God, My King." This inconsistency, however, does point to the style Herbert usually writes in: neither sweet nor plain, it is able to accommodate by turns the subjects and procedures of each style, and occasionally to transcend the limitations of each style. We can perhaps imagine a poetry that did "plainly say, My God, My King," or one that attempted only to "copy" the "sweetness" of God's love; but neither of these kinds of poetry would be so

successful at describing or enacting the adoration of God and His works as is Herbert's style at its best. Especially in "Church-monuments" but even in this poem that style allows Herbert to be both clear and graceful: he employs the syntactical and metrical techniques of the sweet style to seem conversationally simple. The middle lines of stanza two provide the best example: "I often blotted what I had begunne; / This was not quick enough, and that was dead." The lines are regularly iambic with the exception of the initial trochee in the second line, and the stresses in each line conform exactly to those of normal speech. But the modulation of stresses in these lines makes them sound very different from most native plain style iambic pentameter, while the pun on "quick" (enforced by that on "sped" two lines before), meaning "fast" and "alive," suggests that even in this poem that purports to condemn "burnishing," "sprouting," "swelling," and "bustling," Herbert can still not contain his linguistic and stylistic sophistication.

But the poem is finally unsatisfying. As is the case with so many of Herbert's poems, when we reach the end of this one we feel we have been lectured to, because the ending, far from seeming to follow logically from the rest of the poem, seems once again contrived to impress the reader. While A. D. Nuttall claims that "Herbert learns in the Jordan poems that there is nothing for him to write at all" (15) (surely a condescending claim, because if we

believe this to be true we must see Herbert as a man who did not understand or profit by what he had learned), I think that any learning Herbert does occurs in "Jordan (I)," while in "Jordan (II)" he reverts to teaching, or even preaching, in the guise of having learned something. The contrivance of much of his poetry is exemplified in this poem, just as the sort of genuine discovery that sometimes manifests itself is at least partially visible in its companion poem, "Jordan (I)."

I want finally to ask, why is Herbert valued for those poems that are so often anthologized and discussed rather than for "Church-monuments," which is seldom anthologized and which is often dismissed even by such Herbert devotees as Helen Vendler? What is it, that is, that readers seem to like best about Herbert?

First of all, as I have said earlier, he is often dramatic, borrowing this procedure from Donne. "I struck the board, and cry'd, No more" is to most readers more immediately appealing than "While that my soul repairs to her devotion": drama is more popular than the meditation as a genre. Secondly, most readers prize the personal over the impersonal, and many of Herbert's most famous poems are those in which the speaker seems most immediate, and seems to be describing genuine personal conflicts. "Jordan (I)" is this kind of poem, and "Jordan (II)" pretends to be; "The Collar" certainly appears personal, as does "The Holdfast," but the

first of these damages its subject and intention in the same way that I have argued that the second does--by being too obviously contrived to bear investigation as a genuine personal discovery. Thirdly, Herbert is generally considered a "metaphysical" poet, and the metaphysical poets have found favour as being more complex and thus more deserving of serious study than most of the Elizabethan sonneteers, their plain- or sweet-style predecessors, or Ben Jonson and his "sons." While Herbert is, I believe, metaphysical, as that term is defined by James Smith, this designation is not a value-judgement, though it is often taken as one.

Here is how Joan Bennett ends her chapter on Herbert in Five Metaphysical Poets:

> His perfect tact and delicate rendering of the changes of feeling or attitude, and above all his easy command of the right tone, without bluster, without self-consciousness: all this may owe something to his breeding and his early intercourse. (70)

Bennett here commits two common faults of criticism: the overgeneralization and the unsupported biographical attribution. She would certainly be correct if she limited her praise to some of Herbert's poems, although even then "perfect" may be an overstatement; but I think I have illustrated Herbert's frequent failure to command the "right tone" in certain poems, and his frequent self-consciousness as well. I may say in Herbert's defense against this well-meant praise, though, that while Bennett implicitly condemns self-consciousness, this quality is surely a virtue

in Herbert's best poems. So conscious of his self is he that in "Church-monuments" he actually enacts the body-soul dichotomy that informs the poem and gives point to the meditation. But he does often bluster, and his "delicate rendering of the changes of feeling or attitude" sometimes gives us lines like "Oh help, my God! Let not their plot / Kill them and me, / And also thee" ("Affliction [IV]")--that is, he is not above sacrificing delicacy for drama.

I mean here only to protest the sort of criticism that lumps all an author's works together, barely pausing to discriminate between the great and the awful, let alone between the good and the fair. Wayne Booth, indicting, as he thinks, Yvor Winters for "driving all but a saving remnant [of poetry] from his elevated territory," quotes a passage in which Winters offers a strong criticism of the bulk of Emily Dickinson's work, and then scolds: "This, about a poet who in Winters's view 'is a poetic genius of the highest order'!" (50). Booth, like so many non-evaluative critics, seems unable to understand that no poet's work is consistently good or bad, superb or terrible. Nor can they understand that to praise Herbert in general terms, without pausing to discriminate among his poems, is to do a disservice not only to the poet, but also to readers who look to critics for assistance. Herbert is on many occasions a difficult poet, and explication is essential; but explication without evaluation is at best an academic exercise in the most

pejorative sense of that word. Perhaps pointing to "Church-monuments," "Jordan (I)," "Discipline," and "Love (III)" as Herbert's best poems goes some way toward making a general statement about Herbert without misleading. Herbert is a great poet, in a few poems, and a good one in many. He is not, I believe, so great a religious poet as Greville, for the reasons I have given; and this discrimination, I think, is also necessary.

Chapter IV

Drama and Humility in Donne's Religious Poems

The poetry of John Donne is like that of Greville and Herbert in several ways. Like theirs, his is usually written in a style that borrows from both the plain and the sweet styles of the late sixteenth century; and like theirs, his owes to the example of Sidney. In fact, more than either Greville or Herbert, Donne is, like Sidney, a Petrarchan poet, and I believe that many of the virtues of his style and many of the shortcomings of his late religious poems can equally be traced to the attitudes he first develops through the writing of Petrarchan love poems.

I will argue in this chapter that while Petrarchanism in Donne's hands can prove a subtle medium for the examination of earthly love and is in part responsible for encouraging him to develop the style he finally uses in his great religious poems, his rejection of Petrarchanism in those religious poems does not include a complete rejection of the attitudes it fosters. He does turn fairly clearly from earthly to divine love, I believe, but such poems as "Batter

my heart" and "Goodfriday, 1613" still bear the scars of Donne's battle with self-aggrandizing rhetoric and his general attitude of superiority to his beloved-- who is in the religious poems, of course, God. While the religious poems are not Petrarchan, then, the problems with the weaker of them are not unrelated to the problems with the love poems.

But Donne, as I've said, often made good use of the conventions of Petrarchanism and of courtly love in his love poetry. Here are two examples of Donne's varying use of Petrarchan motifs. From "The Canonization," lines 10-13:

> Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love?
> What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd?
> Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground?
> When did my colds a forward spring remove?

--and from "Twicknam garden," lines 19-22:

> Hither with christall vyals, lovers come,
> And take my teares, which are loves wine,
> And try your mistresse Teares at home,
> For all are false, that tast not just like mine.

Anti-Petrarchanism, of course, is simply an aspect of Petrarchanism;[1] too many readers have dismissed the suggestion that Donne is a Petrarchan poet, because he so often parodies or ridicules Petrarchan conceits. But to parody is still to write within the system of that which one parodies, as the lines from "The Canonization" make clear. Writing in the persona of a man chided for loving, Donne makes fun of the pathetic fallacy that would have nature being affected by the symptoms of his love. And though he begins

this stanza with the very funny "Alas, alas," this comedy soon takes second place to the matter-of-fact "Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground?", where the speaker challenges his imagined interlocutor to provide a witness to any external harm his love is doing. Here, Donne exaggerates the proportions of Petrarchan commonplaces--floods of tears, gale-force sighs, and arctic chills are rejected as inapplicable at least to the speaker's specific situation, though the further development of the poem (which is hyperbolic in a different way) suggests that Donne's speaker isn't denying that some lovers' sighs might drown an armada. But this rejection depends on the poet's and the reader's working within the conventions of Petrarchanism. Donald Guss very usefully defines a convention as "an area of understanding between a poet and his readers" (107), and it is within this kind of "area" that Donne writes this poem.

He writes "Twicknam garden" within the same area, but his use of the conventions is different in the lines I've quoted. Here, I believe, he takes his claim (that by the taste of tears one may judge the sincerity of a lover's love) quite seriously. I'm not suggesting that Donne believed this literally, but that he asks the reader to suspend his disbelief for the duration of the poem, because this claim provides Donne with a means to make the point in a clever way: he is the standard, the touchstone, for true love, and is thus not merely another rejected lover but an ideal of

some sort. This raises the poem (if we accept this claim) from the whining of a discontented lover to a generalization worthy of a philosopher of love. I think we won't want to accept the claim, and will persist in seeing the poem as the whining of a discontented lover, but the point remains even if the poem fails: Donne clearly does not here mean to ridicule his claim about the value of his tears.

The key to many of Donne's poems, says Guss, is our understanding of his "pretense that conventional hyperboles are literally true" (61). "The Apparition" is the best example:

> When by thy scorne, O murdresse, I am dead,
> And that thou thinkst thee free
> From all solicitation from mee,
> Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,
> And thee, fain'd vestall, in worse armes shall see;
> Then thy sicke taper will begin to winke,
> And he, whose thou art then, being tyr'd before,
> Will, if thou stirre, or pinch to wake him, thinke
> Thou call'st for more,
> And in false sleepe will from thee shrinke,
> And then poore Aspen wretch, neglected thou
> Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lye
> A veryer ghost then I;
> What I will say, I will not tell thee now,
> Lest that preserve thee'; and since my love is spent,
> I'had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
> Then by my threatnings rest still innocent.

The conventional hyperbole here is that a person can die of unrequited love, and the fun of the poem depends on Donne's pretending that the claim is literally true, and then "[applying] to it laws relevant to its literal but not its metaphorical meaning, and [deducing] consequences from it" (Guss 66). Donne's management of this process is much more

adept here than it is in his first published poem, "The Expiration," whose second stanza begins with a similar acceptance of the truth of a similar convention:

> Goe; and if that word have not quite kil'd thee,
> Ease mee with death, by bidding me goe too.

Here it is not scorn but parting that is to kill the lovers. The claim of "The Expiration" is that it takes only the speaking of one word to cause the lovers' deaths--"nor will we owe / Any, so cheape a death, as saying, Goe"--and, just as this claim is more specific and less figuratively believable than that which begins "The Apparition," so this poem is more contrived and less interesting. (We can understand, I think, how a lover might feel slain by his beloved's scorn, and maybe even how a parting feels like death, but Donne's specificity in making the speaking of one word the actual cause of death diminishes our sympathy for his claim.) In "The Apparition" Donne makes us more willing to believe the convention by stating it as a <u>fait accompli</u> in the poem's first line--he's already looking back, as it were, to the point at which he will have been killed by his mistress's scorn-- and by proceeding from that "When" to the "then": when he's dead, then he will return as a ghost. Moving from the convention to its possible consequences so quickly, Donne encourages his reader to suspend disbelief and, if not accept the premises of the poem, at least enter imaginatively into the specifics of the fantastic experience that he describes.

In Donne we often see the process of thought, that is,

> the mind in the act of discovering or inventing various apprehensions of reality: hence the often turbulent alternation of styles. (85)

The best example in Donne of what John Baxter means here by the "turbulent alternation of styles," or what Cunningham calls "a heterogeneity of styles" (318), is "The Bait." Here Donne, outdoing as he thinks both Marlowe's sweet "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love" and Ralegh's plain "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," changes line-by-line from one style to the other. Here are lines 21 and 22:

> Let coarse bold hands, from slimy nest
> The bedded fish in banks out-wrest,

--and here are lines 4 and 5:

> There will the river whispering runne
> Warm'd by thy eyes, more then the Sunne.

The contrast of plain to sweet (Cunningham quite rightly calls the first of these couplets "rather simple bad writing," but it is bad writing very much in the plain style) is effective to a degree, but I believe Baxter is correct to suggest that what we see is not so much a planned alternation but a reflection of Donne's process of thought. Just as Greville's style, as I have argued, was largely dictated by his belief in man's depravity, so Donne's is dictated by his perception of the world: always able to see manifest possibilities, he created a style that would serve his purpose of describing these possibilities more successfully than the alternation of styles as seen in "The Bait" could do.

And that is the style in which his best religious verse is written. I would like to turn now to the Holy Sonnets and two other divine poems to examine Donne's typical and anomalous styles as we see them in the best and worst of those poems. Here is one of the best:

> Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?
> Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste,
> I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,
> And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
> I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,
> Despaire behind, and death before doth cast
> Such terrour, and my feeble flesh doth waste
> By sinne in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh;
> Onely thou art above, and when towards thee
> By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe;
> But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
> That not one houre my selfe I can sustaine;
> Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,
> And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.

As in Greville's great religious poems, in this sonnet we sense as we read the actual processes of thought and feeling that lead Donne to understand his condition and, in the end, the possibility of his salvation. Comparing this poem with Caelica XCIX, we can see clearly, I believe, that, as profound as Donne's struggle is, it is neither so profound nor so doubtful of outcome as is Greville's. Richard Waswo nicely formulates the difference between Greville's religious poems and Donne's:

> Greville rises through the experiences in which Donne is perpetually engaged, the fears of judgement and hypocrisy, the passionate outcries for true contrition, to that experience which Donne, in verse, never reached: the complete renunciation of self. (131)

Even in this poem, which ends with his acknowledgement that he can be saved only by the active intercession of God, Donne

appears prominently as the recipient of the saving action: he is "winged" and "drawn" by God. At the end of Caelica XCIX, as I have shown, though it is specifically Greville who is saved, yet the impersonality is emphasized by the syntax: "Thus hath his death raised up this soul of mine." The pronoun referring to Greville is the poem's last word; the emphasis is on God's saving action.

Nevertheless, Donne's poem is a great one, and could suffer only in comparison to a poem so nearly perfect as Greville's. Though Waswo is certainly correct to identify Donne's inability to efface himself as a fault in his religious poems (as perhaps it also is in his love poems, where his beloved, even when she is the ostensible subject, is generally exploited only as a convenient excuse for Donne's demonstration of wit), in "Thou hast made me" Donne's portrayal of himself is far from flattering. Just as Bunyan manifests a degree of pride in calling himself the "chief of sinners," so Donne obviously makes the depravity of which he accuses himself in this poem a substitute for the sexual prowess he celebrates in many of the Songs and Sonnets: even at inconstancy he is accomplished. In fact, the comparison to Bunyan is apposite in another way: both writers realize that left to themselves they are unable to be constant for even the shortest span of time--"not one houre my selfe I can sustain," says Donne. Donne's emphasis on himself is, however, ameliorated from the beginning of the sonnet by its

first word--"Thou," referring to God--and by its description of God's work and Donne's need for maintenance by God: "Repaire me now." In this poem Donne is about as self-effacing as he is capable of being.

And the poem's style assists him in trying to remove the emphasis from himself. It is predominantly plain, and, as I have suggested in my discussion of Herbert, the plain style is probably the one a poet should choose if he wishes to dignify God and abase himself. It is one of Greville's achievements that he can do both these things while maintaining both dignity and intellectual force. Donne here manages something like that; his distancing of his "self" from his flesh, for example, in lines seven and eight, is rather like Herbert's distinction between soul and flesh in "Church-monuments," and is similarly effective. It is the flesh that "contains" sin ("sinne in it") and weighs down the soul, which must strive to rise to heaven despite this fleshly bondage. (Compare Marvell's "A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body," which ends with the body accusing the soul--"What but a soul could have the wit / To build me up for sin so fit?" [41- 2]. It may be that the two writers' locating of sin in the two traditional parts of man says something about their opinions about earthly life.)

I would like to point to some of the features of style that make this poem so effective, and that demonstrate Donne's awareness of the suitability of that style to this

subject. Probably the most obvious felicity of style in this poem is the frequent repetition and balancing of grammatical units, and the matching of that repetition to the metrical structure of the lines. In line two we have "me now, for now," both iambs; in line three, "to death, and death," both iambs; in line six, "Despaire behind, and death before," a more complex balancing of disyllabic words and phrases and of adverbs of place; "in it, which it" in line eight; and in line ten, "I can looke, I rise," which gets the emphasis on the verbs and also on the first pronoun. Also subtly effective are the similar compound verbs that end lines two, six, seven, and eight: "doth haste," "doth cast," "doth waste," and "doth weigh." These repetitions, each emphasized by the metre that helps unite them, are all very much to the point; they exist only to reinforce the poem's meaning, and never as ornament (as, for example, the effective but obtrusive repetition of "arise" does at the end of the second line of "At the round earths imagin'd corners: "blow / Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise / From death . . .").

The diction and metre of the poem are plain, as well. It is composed almost entirely of monosyllabic words (only eighteen of the poem's words are polysyllabic, and "towards," which appears twice, is both times pronounced as a monosyllable), none of which is sweet, with the exception of "pleasures" which is used here only to describe their renunciation; and its metre is predominantly regular, only

three lines containing variations and those the most common--trochaic substitutions in the first position. The first line seems to begin with two trochees, which is uncommon, but those trochees help Donne establish quickly both the degree of emphasis on God he wants to maintain in the poem-- "Thou hast"--and the importance of God's acting on him: "made me." In the eleven regular iambic lines of the poem, Donne uses the metrical regularity to make his points all the stronger. I've suggested that he uses regular metre to enforce the meanings already emphasized by his repetitions. He uses it as well, more successfully here than in most of his other poetry, to establish a cadence that reinforces the solemnity of his subject. The best examples of what I mean occur in lines four and twelve. In line four the alternation of monosyllables with the disyllabic "pleasures" and one of the poem's two trisyllabic words, "yesterday," establishes a slow rhythm conducive to the conveying of Donne's understanding of his situation. And in line twelve the increasing stress on each word of the nonetheless iambic first two feet impresses upon us the speaker's feeling of helplessness: completing the previous line's "so" clause, line twelve says "That not one houre my selfe I can sustaine." Donne also gets very strong stress on "selfe," and by separating the two parts of the word "my selfe" (if indeed this is Donne's spelling and not a typesetter's) further emphasizes the separation of the

various parts of his being. This is one more indication of his attempt in this poem at objectivity or impersonality.

The poem has a rational structure, too, one that Donne creates by using his sonnet form to best advantage. The poem begins with Donne's address to God and his request to be "repaired"; the rest of the octave gives in a dramatic way typical of Donne several reasons for his needing repair, or salvation: he is close to death; he is pursued by despair (the greatest of sins) even as he runs toward death, which advances as fast to meet him; his flesh is heavy with sins, and he feels that flesh dragging him to hell. The sestet begins with a turn toward God, a turn marked by the effective trochee "Onely," and credits God with giving the poet permission even to look to Him, which looking allows him to move in that direction. There is one complication, though, which is examined in the third and fourth lines of the sestet: God must be always with Donne, for he cannot sustain himself, fend off despair, for even one hour if he is unaided. The couplet then gives the only solution, once again dramatically, but in a way that takes up at least to some extent two of the poem's metaphors: the "repairs" Donne needed may be effected by giving him wings, and the problem of Donne's flesh dragging him to hell may be solved if God acts as a lodestone to turn that iron weight to advantage and draw him up to heaven.

As I have said, it is typical of Donne that even in a

sonnet to God, written in the plain style and with a rational organization, drama must play a large part. The figurative language of the sonnet is almost wholly concerned with actions: making, decaying, repairing, hastening, running, looking, casting, looking again, rising. For Donne, being saved must be an active process, and not one limited to mental or emotional action: only by means of these figures of movement can he imagine himself finally entering heaven.

Before leaving this poem for another one I consider one of Donne's best, I want to ask a larger question, the one that to a greater or lesser extent governs my study of all three of these poets: what are the implications of the style, the structure, and the means of employing these tools that Donne has chosen in this poem? If my claim is correct, and there is a style, perhaps not identifiable by description but certainly by pointing to specific examples, better suited than any other to writing about religious truths, or to God Himself, to what degree has Donne approached it here? This is a great religious poem, and in most respects a reverent one, too: Donne presents himself as depraved and as saveable only by God's grace. His style is plain, the poem's structure clear and rational, the ending both theologically and artistically right. The only possible fault of the poem is the drama. By presenting both himself and God as active participants in the mini-drama of his approaching death, Donne risks trivializing the situation and his understanding

of it. I don't think he does so trivialize it, though. The sense of impending despair at rapidly approaching death that Donne creates is crucial to the tangible rescue by God proposed in the couplet: God, Donne hopes, will quite literally lift him up out of the horizontal plane on which he races towards death pursued by despair, saving him in a physical manner from the personified dangers he fears. The emotional force he gains from this visible salvation only adds to the profound understanding of his own mortality and depravity as it is portrayed in the poem. In this poem, Donne's talents are brilliantly employed in the service of the highest subject.

"This is my playes last scene" may profitably be read as a companion poem to "Thou hast made me," so similar are the two in subject, theme, and style.

> This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint
> My pilgrimages last mile; and my race
> Idly, yet quickly runne, hath this last pace,
> My spans last inch, my minutes latest point,
> And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoynt
> My body, and soule, and I shall sleepe a space,
> But my'ever-waking part shall see that face,
> Whose feare already shakes my every joynt:
> Then, as my soule, to'heaven her first seate, takes
> flight,
> And earth-borne body, in the earth shall dwell,
> So, fall my sinnes, that all may have their right,
> To where they'are bred, and would presse me, to hell.
> Impute me righteous, thus purg'd of evill,
> For thus I leave the world, the flesh, the devill.

In this poem as in the previous one Donne is near death, he has been running quickly to it, he sees the futility of his life, he fears death, he feels his sins trying to "presse"

him to hell, and he acknowledges that only grace, or imputed righteousness, can save him. And this poem, like the previous one, is dramatic: here Donne exploits his figure of "running" more fully, and adds to it that of a play and of a pilgrimage. (In fact, though this poem contains several examples of Donne's characteristic carelessness with metre, the figure of running inspires him, in the first four lines, to metrical brilliance.) The poem's conclusion, though, differs from that of the previous one in its assurance of salvation. "Thou hast made me" ends with an understanding of how God "may" save the speaker; the winging, preventing, and drawing are all governed by that conditional word. But in this poem, the repeated "thus" in the couplet seems to bring to a happy conclusion the progression of verbs in the sestet. In line nine, the speaker's soul "takes flight" (present tense); in line ten, his body "shall dwell" (future tense) in the earth; and in lines eleven and twelve, his sins, that "would presse [him], to hell," are instructed to "fall" (imperative mood) to hell themselves. This progression of verbs, from present tense to future tense to imperative mood, gives the sense of the speaker's understanding of his situation (as his soul takes flight, so his body shall dwell in the earth) and his logical insistence that his sins perform their part--the assurance that they will do so given by "So." Then the couplet gives us the repeated "thus." In both lines it means "in this way," but the tenses of the verbs

that follow if change its sense slightly. In line thirteen, Donne asks God to "Impute [him] righteous, thus purg'd of evill." The metre of the line, which gives "righteous" three syllables and emphasizes the difficulty of the repeated "u" in "thus" and "purg'd," draws attention to that "thus": it refers to the accomplishment of the actions in the previous four lines, which will "purge" him of evil. Only then can God "Impute [him] righteous." In line fourteen, we have the sense of a valedictory as the speaker ascends, that sense created by the logical "For thus" and the present tense of "I leave." The "thus" here is more conclusive than it was in the previous line; not only have the actions of the sestet been accomplished, but the speaker's request for imputed righteousness has also been granted, and "thus" he leaves "the world, the flesh, the devill."

So everything in the sestet of this poem works to give us a sense of the poet's assurance of his salvation. What of the octave? Here, Donne first describes imaginatively his position, as he did in the last poem: he is at the end of his life. Though the progression is not explicit, it seems likely that Donne is in his five descriptions lessening the "time" and "space" he has left. A play's last scene still allows time for some action, a pilgrimage's last mile perhaps allows less; a race's last pace is only about three feet long, however, and if one is running, that pace will be covered very quickly indeed. And the last inch of a span is

probably a slightly larger amount of space than a second--a "minutes latest point"--is of time. Though Donne doesn't make this progression as clear as he might--the measurements are of time, space, space, space, and time--he does treat each in terms of the other, and I believe a progression can be seen. In Donne's favour here is his metre, as I mentioned earlier. In the first two lines, Donne makes brilliant use of regular iambic metre. Just as the first line of Hamlet's famous soliloquy is probably regular, so that he says not "**that** is the question" but "that **is** the question"--suggesting that he has been thinking about other questions, but has decided that "To be or not to be" is the crucial one--so here Donne is speaking definitely: "This **is** my playes last scene." And, just as the trisyllabic pronunciation of "righteous" in the first line of the couplet sets up the important point made by "thus purg'd," so in the poem's second line the four-syllable "pilgrimages" emphasizes the stress on "last" and that on "and." "Last" makes the point about Donne's impending death, while "and" sets up the next metaphor, that of the race, both grammatically and metrically. The terminal consonant of "and" and the initial of "my" are difficult to pronounce together, so the line is slowed down; this is followed by the strong enjambment, initial trochee, and three "y"s of "race / Idly, yet quickly runne" that support the sense of the words with the ease and speed of pronunciation. Finally, in the fourth line, after using "last" four times,

Donne uses his metre and a variant of the word--"latest"--to conclude his series of metaphors strongly: while "last" is primarily spatial, "latest" is temporal, emphasizing death's "instant" action in the next line.

The next four lines examine what comes next, now that Donne is at his "minutes latest point." And they do so in a way that keeps the two parts of the speaker's being--body and soul--always before us. First, death "unjoynts" his two parts. The Concise Oxford gives a definition of "joint" apposite to Donne's meaning: "point at which, contrivance by which, two parts of artificial structure are joined, rigidly or so as to allow of movement." The human being is, in Donne's conception, the "artificial structure" which is the "joint" between body and soul; and that joint allows for "movement" between the two--as is attested by the volumes of philosophy written on the subject of the contest between body and soul. Once the two parts are unjointed, they do different things. The body (which becomes the "I" of the rest of the line) sleeps "a space," while the soul-- the poet's "ever-waking part"--flies to heaven, and sees the face of God. Having separated the two parts and their actions, though, Donne keeps both before us in the eighth line: the face is that the fear of which "already shakes [his] every joynt." Here, "joynt" means "structure in animal body by which two bones are fitted together." So the fear that Donne feels in his mind, or soul, shakes his skeleton, or body,

even in prospect.

So the octave sets up the logical assurance of salvation that Donne enjoys in the sestet. That is, by describing those things of which he is certain--that he is at the latest point of his life, that death will separate body from soul, that each will do what is proper to it--he works up to the "Then"-"as"-"so"- "thus" progression that provides him with the assurance of his salvation in the final line. As is the case in Greville's Caelica XCVIII and XCIX, it is the grammar and syntax of the poem that help Donne understand the conditions for and the possibility of his own salvation.

To make this claim is to suggest that language is more than a medium for describing thought and emotions. It is, in fact, the medium in which one thinks and feels. For Greville, for Herbert, and for Donne, in a few poems each, the act of writing precipitates an understanding that could not have been arrived at independently of that writing. So every detail of the poem in which such an understanding is reached is of great importance. Style, then, is not an adjunct, a technique, or an entity separable from "content"; it is part of the medium, part of the "form of discovery" that these poets have employed.

Yvor Winters, in his essay "Preliminary Problems," says that "the nearer two poems may be to the highest degrees of excellence, the harder it will be to choose between them. Two poems, in fact, might be so excellent that there would be

small profit in endeavoring to say that one was better, but one could arrive at this conclusion only after a careful examination of both" (Defense 362). I believe that "Thou hast made me" is superior to "This is my playes last scene," but both are very close to the highest degree of excellence. "This is my playes last scene" has two small flaws, however, one metrical and one theological. The less important is of course the metrical flaw, though in a poem so good every flaw is noteworthy. In line nine, Donne expects his reader to reduce the three syllables of "to'heaven" to one syllable, and a weakly stressed one at that. The elision of "heaven" to one syllable is common, and the elision of a pronoun or a preposition and the following word is not uncommon; Donne accomplishes that in line seven's "my'ever," which is pronounced as two syllables. But even if "to'heaven" is read as having two syllables, both must be the weakly stressed ones of the anapestic foot "to'heaven her." There is no way to make this line work properly. Here Donne has simply not found a way to get both his ideas--that the soul will fly to heaven, and that it will do so because, just as sins fall to where they are bred, so the soul must ascend to its "first seat"--to coexist in a metrically acceptable line.

The other problem, a more serious one, is that Donne's very assurance at the end of the poem, an assurance largely created, as I have shown, by the poem's syntax and grammar, is yet one that seems a bit too easily won. While in "Thou

hast made me" Donne always refers the problem of his salvation to God, and realizes at the end that God "may" do the things that will save him, here only the reference to imputed righteousness in the couplet suggests God's part in his salvation: most of the poem is a naturalistic account that depends as much on gravity and longing for an original home (heaven for the soul, earth for the body, hell for sins) as it does on God's grace. That is, God's imputation of righteousness seems to follow, not enable, Donne's shedding of sins and flying to heaven. So here, as is so often the case in Herbert's poems, the poet seems to have gained the assurance of his salvation too easily. We never see such ease in Greville, nor do we see it in "Church-monuments" or "Thou hast made me"; and they are for that reason better poems.

In the introduction to their anthology Quest for Reality, Winters and Kenneth Fields explain that the poetry they mean to exemplify in their selections exhibits "a high degree of concentration which aims at understanding and revealing the particular subject as fully as possible" (2). Yet the one of Donne's Holy Sonnets that they choose is neither of the two I have so far discussed--both of which, I believe, exemplify their criterion--but this one:

> At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
> Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
> From death, you numberlesse infinities
> Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe,
> All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
> All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrranies,
> Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes,
> Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe.

> But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,
> For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
> 'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,
> When wee are there; here on this lowly ground,
> Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good
> As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

This poem is very different from the two I've discussed. It begins with a description--a beautiful and evocative one--of the heralding of the last judgement, and ends with a statement of Church doctrine. Between these we have a list of the ways people can be slain, and a recognition by the poet of his need to ask pardon before the judgement day he describes has arrived. Donne's style in this poem is more ornamental than that in the previous two; his diction is frequently hyperbolic and even redundant; and several of the lines contain more empty syllables than words that develop the poem's meaning. What then is it that so impressed Fields and Winters?

In his essay on Poe, Winters describes a "procedure which results in much of the poetry of Donne": "the contemplation of a discrepancy between personal experience and a standard truth" (Defense 241). I believe that such contemplation must have been the occasion for Donne's writing the first line, and then the rest, of this poem: his contemplation of the passage from the Book of Revelation (7:1)--"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth . . ."--and of his realization that the earth really has no corners. This is not quite the "personal experience" mentioned by Winters, but it is the discrepancy between Donne's scientific knowledge and his belief in the "standard truth" represented by the Bible that

results in the "imagin'd corners" of this poem. I believe as well that the cleverness, the desire to be seen as clever, that manifests itself in those "imagin'd corners" damages the rest of the poem to a degree, and makes it a lesser poem than "Thou hast made me" or "This is my playes last scene."

The faults are in the poem's style and in the poet's relative detachment from his subject. The style, as I have said, is ornamental through most of the poem; details (such as those in the list of ways of dying) are presented not to clarify the poet's understanding of his subject, but to decorate the poem. The diction is for the most part plain, even so, but the plainness is itself partly in service of the decorative intention. The poem's octave does little more than describe the day of judgement and enumerate the "numberlesse infinities / Of soules" who will return to be judged; contemplating this spectacle of his own creating makes the poet in the sestet turn from the many to the one, and realize that he needs to ask forgiveness for his own sins before that day. There is only a tenuous connection between the two strongly demarcated parts of the poem, and even the style undergoes a clear change, from the ornamental style employed to describe the judgement day to the plain style suitable for the poem's didactic, doctrinal ending. In the octave, the fault of the style is excess: the repetition of "arise" at the end of the second line, the redundant "numberlesse infinities," and the self-indulgent list of ways of dying; in the sestet, its fault, a lesser one, is a certain degree of didacticism not altogether

disguised by the personal tone Donne achieves by changing from the third person in the octave to the first in the sestet.

And the poet's detachment can be seen in his styles. As I have suggested, the self-congratulatory recognition that the earth is round and that the Book of Revelation's "corners" must thus be "imagin'd" ones demonstrates Donne's superiority to his invention from the beginning. One need only compare the first four lines of this poem with the last two of Greville's XIX, "Sion lies waste," to see the difference between an authentic and an artificial call for the day of judgement to begin:

> Rather sweet Iesus, fill up time, and come
> To yeeld the sinne her everlasting doome.

Greville concentrates on the meaning of the judgement day, Donne on the drama. In the sestet of Donne's poem, beginning with the "But" that seems here to signal Donne's realization that he's more interested in the state of his own soul than in that of the "numberlesse infinities" of souls he's been describing, the style changes to allow him to address God with less hyperbole than he'd employed in the octave. But even here Donne seems insincere. While in "This is my playes last scene" even the prospect of seeing God's face shook his every joint, and while in "Thou hast made me" he can't even look toward Heaven without God's leave, here his apparent acknowledgement of his own sinfulness is expressed in the conditional mood: "For, if above all these, my sinnes abound . . ." This lackadaisical attitude is probably responsible for the tired doctrinal conclusion, and for the carelessness of the adverbial "there," which seems to have no

antecedent: "'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace, / When wee are there," Donne says, but that "there" seems to serve only as a (very effective, it's true) foil to the first word of the next clause: "here on this lowly ground."[2]

I have been harsh in my criticisms of this poem because I believe that Donne has written several that are far better in every way. But I want now to point out those features of this poem that distinguish it, despite its faults, as the work of a very great poet. Although the description of the judgement day in the first four lines is essentially ornamental, the ornament is beautiful. While I believe the first line to be seriously flawed because of Donne's self-conscious ingenuity, the next three lines, repetitions, redundancies and all, are in their way brilliant. I've complained about the repetition of "arise," and it is obtrusive. But that repetition gets greater stress on the second "arise," which is strongly enjambed with the next line and which thus gives the whole phrase "arise / From death" a series of rising stresses that is emotionally effective, though a bit intellectually dishonest: Donne is allowing his musical skill to override the meaning of his words. Similarly, though "numberlesse infinities" is redundant, still its seven syllables help convey with sound the sense of great numbers; and, if we want to be charitable, we can argue that "numberlesse" has a possible secondary meaning: not just "so many that they cannot be numbered," but also "unique and thus not reducible to statistics"--that is, we might want to say that Donne is

suggesting the uniqueness of each human soul. I believe this may be giving too much to Donne--the secondary sense I've suggested I have derived from the context, and it does not appear in OED--but perhaps he deserves the benefit of the doubt. I am willing to give it to him in the case of "scattred bodies"; we know from his sermons that Donne was interested in the problem of the bodily resurrection of the dead, and in what would become of those who had been dismembered--so that "scattred" means not only that the bodies are in various places on the globe, but that they are some of them actually in pieces. Here the secondary sense, while again, I believe, damaging in its ingenuity, adds something particularly Donnean to this picture of the last judgement.

And, although the list of ways of dying is quite unnecessary, Donne does handle it well, both rhetorically and metrically. He begins by describing the extremes of time at which the souls he addresses may have been overthrown or may yet be overthrown: at the time of the flood and at the time of the final conflagration. Though the rhythm of this line is difficult, it sacrifices fluidity to sense. The ascending stresses on the regular second, third, and fourth feet force the reader to emphasize the words "and" and "shall"--making stronger Donne's point about the extremes of time and the inevitabilty of the day of judgement he so lovingly describes. He then arranges the list of ways of dying to begin with common causes--war, dearth, age-- and to end, surprisingly but, when we think about it, both accurately and inclusively, with "chance"--which in its way governs all the ways

he's listed. He emphasizes this point with the ascending stresses in the first two feet of that line, stresses that he creates by beginning with a disyllable, following that with the monosyllable "law" in the weakly stressed half of its foot, and ending the list with "chance," which thus gets a very strong stress.

The sestet is less distinguished, as I have argued. The opposition between the vague "there" and the less vague "here" in the twelfth line is metrically effective at least, but that's about all that can be said for the poem's conclusion, which is an unsatisfying one, and one that doesn't seem to follow from the octave. The octave has its beauties, the sestet none, and the poem as a whole is, I believe, a failure. Here Donne is not engaged with his subject in any meaningful way, and his lack of engagement damages the poem irreparably.

The two most often anthologized of the Holy Sonnets are "Batter my heart" and "Death be not proud." I would like to spend a little time on them in an attempt to understand what it is that makes them Donne's best-known religious poems before proceeding to several others that I believe are among his best. Here then is "Batter my heart":

> Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
> As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
> That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee,'and bend
> Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
> I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due,
> Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end,
> Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
> But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.
> Yet dearely'I love you,'and would be loved faine,
> But am betroth'd unto your enemie:
> Divorce mee,'untie, or breake that knot againe;
> Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I

Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.

I want to ask once again, before discussing this poem: what is it that a serious reader, or a serious poet for that matter, expects from a poem addressed to God? Have we the right to come to such a poem with expectations at all? I think we do, and I think that we have a right to expect such qualities as reverence, a desire for the truth, and an attempt on the part of the poet to express his understanding of the truth he has set out to discover. That truth at which he aims and his understanding of it may be limited, but such is the human condition, and that's where reverence enters: an intelligent poet will not scorn what he cannot understand, but will practice humility. And his style will be the medium through which the reader will perceive these qualities. What shall we think, then, of "Batter my heart"?

Clearly, Donne is more interested in this sonnet in drama and paradox than in discovery of a truth or communication of his understanding. In the direct address to God that begins the sonnet can be seen both those interests and a bit of both the ingenuity and the doctrinal correctness that damaged "At the round earths imagin'd corners" as well: the drama in the trochaic "Batter," the paradox in the first-person address to a "three-person'd God," and both the ingenuity and the doctrinal correctness in that last phrase as well. Why, in an address to God, would a poet presume to remind Him of the Council of Constantinople's decision to regard Him as "three-person'd"? Well, it's the sort of high-handedness that Donne finds difficult

to resist, and that harms even some of his love poems, when it becomes clear that he is more interested in displaying his own wit even than in seducing his beloved. In a poem addressed to God, though, such high-handedness is unforgivable.

But it is the basis of the poem, throughout which Donne tells God what to do in order to save him. Using the common figure of the human being or the soul as a town being beseiged by God and Devil (Bunyan's famous allegory The Holy War will, in effect, expand Donne's four lines to about three hundred pages) and that of secular love and marriage as a pattern of the divine, Donne creates several paradoxes in the poem, only to conclude with two more paradoxes in the couplet. At no point in the poem, it seems to me, is Donne concerned to do more than describe his state or instruct God in the techniques of salvation, and even the descriptions and instructions, loaded as they are with monosyllabic and often alliterating verbs and arranged in lines the metre of which is often awkward if not disruptive to the sense, are neither intellectually nor sensuously precise. Donne makes several claims about his state and his wish that it were otherwise--"I . . . / Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end"; "Reason . . . mee should defend, / But is captiv'd"; "Yet dearely'I love you,'and would be loved faine, / But am betroth'd unto your enemie"--but never gives a real reason for the discrepancy between reality and his ideal. He reinforces the claims rather with exclamations ("Oh"), adverbs ("dearely," "faine"), and metaphors ("viceroy" and "betrothed"); this is his

way of avoiding any serious exploration of the state of his soul, while at the same time giving the impression of conducting such an exploration. The best line of the poem makes effective use of metre to emphasize Donne's direct dependence on God--"Take mee to you, imprison mee"--but this line goes on to set up the couplet, which, with its paradoxes (the second in at least questionable taste in a poem addressed to God), concludes not a search for truth but a witty pattern of paradoxical figures.

Before saying any more about this poem, I would like to look briefly at the other one most often seen in anthologies:

> Death be not proud, though some have called thee
> Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,
> For, those, whom thou thinkst, thou dost overthrow,
> Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
> From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
> Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
> And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
> Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
> Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
> And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,
> And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
> And better then thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
> One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
> And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

To help make a larger point about the poem, I want to mention, though I do not want to dwell on, some of its more obvious flaws: the falseness of some of its claims (those killed by death do, in fact, die; the equation that assigns greater pleasure to death than to rest or sleep is an unfounded one; it is not always the case that "the good die young"; opium does not in any meaningful sense make a person sleep "better" than can death, although what the comparative refers to is unclear in any case); the indolence of the grammar in lines five and six; and the obviousness of the

paradox that governs and is in fact the reason for the poem--death is not <u>really</u> death to a Christian. I might point out, though, that the poem's argument is really made in the couplet, and so the poem might be condensed to the first two and the last two lines:

> Death be not proud, though some have called thee
> Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,
> One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
> And death shall be no more: death, thou shalt die.

This, it seems to me, is what Donne really wants to say, and in these four lines he says it quite well. He makes the Christian points that supply the poem's invention without spending time on the spurious reasoning of the intervening ten lines, and makes them in about as much detail as the paradox deserves. The metre of these four lines works well to emphasize their sense: the trochaic substitution at the beginning of the first line makes even stronger by precedent that in the second; and the monosyllables of the second part of the second line, beginning with the strongly stressed logical connective "for," effectively deflate the terms "Mighty and dreadfull" (which are given to death, the strongly stressed word in the previous line tells us, only by "some," and obviously not by those, like Donne, who are in the know). The ascending stresses on the first four words of the couplet, emphasized by the grouping of consonants difficult to pronounce (<u>short sleepe past</u>) set up the liberating alliterative flow of the line's second half ("wee wake eternally"), and the couplet's last four words duplicate this pattern of ascending stresses, the two feet sounding nearly spondaic but remaining iambic. These four lines, then, are the

best in the poem, the couplet especially doing the work that Donne wants the whole poem to do. But, I believe, the rest of the poem is a distraction from this work.

Because the poem is neither about nor addressed to God, although it is properly included with the other Holy Sonnets because its subject, while not explicitly Christian on its own terms, is likely God's overthrowing of death ("souls deliverie" providing the most obvious clue), the issue of "reverence" that I raised in connection with "Batter my heart" is not so immediately relevant here. In fact, Donne's contempt for death throughout this poem is probably suitable for a Christian. He tells death that it is not mighty and dreadful; he calls it "poor"; he calls it a slave; he scorns it because of the unsavoury company it keeps; and he predicts its own death. And perhaps most pointed of all is his belittling of it as being pleasant, providing rest and delivery to good men, and being less efficacious than simple drugs: what insult greater to a power that imagines itself fearsome than to praise it for the good it does to those it means to terrify? (I've already questioned the truth of Donne's assertions; what I'm concerned with here is what effect he means them to have in his argument, if these lines can be called an argument.) The tone of the poem, then, is one of gentle contempt--gentle because ameliorated by the description of death's benefits. And Donne's style, which here borrows diction mainly from the plain style and a preference for effect rather than truth from the sweet, is consistent in its service of that tone. The

personification of death is also very much in the tradition of the plain style, of course, and it is that personification that makes the details of the poem at least superficially effective; as he does so often with the ladies he addresses in his love poems, here Donne indulges in a monologue that allows no room for interjection or rebuttal.

But the poem, if it means to persuade, is a failure. As I have said, it is really only the couplet that makes strongly the claim that is the poem's ostensible subject, and even the couplet is not argument but simple assertion, and an assertion with which only those who share Donne's faith will agree. The rest of the poem is rhetorical flash without substance: most of Donne's claims are false or dubious, and the vehicle of his personification overrides his tenor when he derides death for being a slave and for keeping company with poison, war, and sickness. Finally, as is the case in "Batter my heart" and even more obviously here, Donne is removed from his subject. The one reference to himself--"nor yet canst thou kill mee" in line four-- seems out of place, and is irrelevant even to the kinds of claims Donne then goes on to make. While Donne may have been equal to his invention, his choice of form betrayed him. Ben Jonson said sonnets "were alike that tyrant's bed, where some who were too short were racked, others too long cut short" (462); here, Donne has unprofitably racked his subject.

To move from "Death be not proud" and "Batter my heart" to the last of the Holy Sonnets that I want to discuss is to see

Donne, after having indulged in intellectual pride and rhetorical sophistication for its own sake, practising to some extent at least the humility he acknowledges is necessary to salvation:

> Oh, to vex me, contraryes meet in one:
> Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott
> A constant habit; that when I would not
> I change in vowes, and in devotione.
> As humorous is my contritione
> As my prophane Love, and as soone forgott:
> As ridlingly distemper'd, cold and hott,
> As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.
> I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to day
> In prayers, and flattering speaches I court God:
> To morrow I quake with true feare of his rod.
> So my devout fitts come and go away
> Like a fantastique Ague: save that here
> Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.

In this poem Donne explores fully the implications of his "inconstancy" as he describes it in "Thou hast made me" and "This is my playes last scene." Like Bunyan's in Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, Donne's descriptions here of the vacillations of the human mind (or soul, as both writers would have it) are psychologically acute and unsparingly honest. While in "At the round earths imagin'd corners" Donne equivocates about his status as chief of sinners--"if above all these, my sinnes abound"--here that is his starting point. But he goes further to condemn himself: "So my devout fitts come and go away / Like a fantastique Ague": again like Bunyan, though he is persuaded of his sinfulness, the conviction does not stay with him but comes and goes according to his moods. It is this inconstancy that "vexes" him, and for Donne being vexed probably meant more than simply being annoyed: in Biathanatos, OED points out, he uses "vexed" in a violent context: "After the persecutors had beat out her teeth,

and vexed her with many other tortures . . ." This sonnet, then, is not about Donne's tiresome but characteristic changeability; it is specifically about the torments he suffers because of inconstancy in his love of God.

While most of the lines of "Death be not proud," I suggested, do nothing to advance the limited argument Donne wants to make in that poem, in "Oh, to vex me" each line is bent to the service of the last line, which really seems to need to be explained: "Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare." If this line were not adequately supported by the poem, it might be dismissed--with so many of Donne's other lines--as merely an exercise in clever paradox. But the claim is, I believe, supported. Donne succeeds in the poem not only in describing his inconstancy but also in making the reader feel the anguish it causes him; and, as always, his medium for this describing and conveying of feeling is his style. In this poem Donne plays polysyllabic words and lines against monosyllabic, regular iambic lines against those with emphatic variations, metre against speech stress, and even experiments with feminine endings in lines that recall Greville's hendecasyllables: "I change in vowes, and in devotione. / As humorous is my contritione / As my prophane Love . . ."--all in the service of registering the feelings that accompany the changes of devotion he explores. His diction, from the first line's "vex," works also to make clear to the reader the poet's contempt of his own inconstancy. "Unnaturally," "prophane," "ridlingly distemper'd," "flattering," "court," "devout fitts," and

"fantastique" are all strongly self- condemnatory terms aimed at describing as unflatteringly as possible the speaker's, as he sees it, contemptible changeability in the face of the truth that, on his best days, he acknowledges not just intellectually but bodily when he shakes with fear.

As is always the case in Donne's best poems, the most effective lines use the regular iambic metre to enforce both meaning and feeling. In line three, "that when I would not," with the strongest stresses on "that" (which introduces the result of the "constant habit" he's been describing) and "not," makes clear Donne's recognition of and opposition to his inconstancy. Line six plays the strong stress on "Love," which is nonetheless the weakly stressed syllable in its foot, against the even more strongly stressed "and" to emphasize the greater sin occasioned by Donne's inconstancy: not only is his contrition "humorous," but he is as likely to forget his repentance as he was to forget a mistress (the conjunction of these two elements makes Donne's confession here all the more damning). And in line twelve, "So my devout fitts come and go away," Donne gets a pattern of ascending stresses on the second and third feet, so that, though the phrase "devout fitts" describes baldly enough his understanding of the seriousness with which he habitually takes his devotion, it is on the verb "come" and its opposite "go" that even greater stress falls: bad enough that his devotion is but a fit, even worse that the fit, like a seizure, comes and goes unpredictably.

So the conclusion "Those are my best dayes, when I shake with

feare" is, I think, adequately supported by the poem. Only when shaking with fear does Donne know that he is being constant to his faith; he may be at his ease when courting God in "flattering speaches" or when in a "devout fitt", but that ease is a sign of his reprobation. Just as in "This is my playes last scene" the expectation of seeing God's face "shakes [his] every joynt," and just as in "Thou hast made me" he cannot sustain himself for one hour without God's help, so in "Oh, to vex me" Donne understands that his sinfulness resides in large part in a reliance on his own resources, which are bound to fail him. But while in the other two poems Donne finally turns to God for help--in "Thou hast made me" as a supplicant, in "This is my playes last scene" in confidence that his salvation is already accomplished--here Donne goes no further than to understand that his salvation is contingent upon his true fear of God. In that way, this poem seems almost a precursor to the other two, in both of which Donne seems relatively constant in fear, and is ready to turn to God (if He will permit it--"when towards thee / By thy leave I can looke"); here, he is content to accomplish a sort of contrition. By admitting through the poem that one of his greatest sins is inconstancy in devotion, he has to an extent prepared his soul for the workings of God.

And I believe that we are justified in taking the best of these Holy Sonnets--the three I have just been discussing--so seriously. Just as for Greville and Herbert their best religious poems are not versified doctrine but genuine attempts to

understand, and to communicate their understanding of, their souls' relationship to God, so in these three poems all the features of Donne's style work to persuade him of his sinfulness and the reader of his sincerity in recognizing it. While such poems as "Death be not proud" and "Batter my heart" may have been written in a "devout fitt," these three seem to have been written on one of his "best dayes."

I want to conclude my discussion of Donne's religious poems with "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward" and "A Hymn to God the Father." In the first of these, brilliant poem though it is, Donne once again shows himself more interested in the ingenuity he can bring to bear on an invention that is itself perhaps insufficiently serious for a religious poem than in the exploration of truth; in the second, his subject is simple, his organization and argument straightforward, his style plain, and the result is a great poem. Here, first, is "Goodfriday":

> Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,
> The intelligence that moves, devotion is,
> And as the other Spheares, by being growne
> Subject to forraigne motions, lose their owne,
> And being by others hurried every day,
> Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:
> Pleasure or businesse, so our Soules admit
> For their first mover, and are whirld by it.
> Hence is't, that I am carryed toward the West
> This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.
> There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,
> And by that setting endlesse day beget;
> But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
> Sinne had eternally benighted all.
> Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see
> That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
> Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;
> What a death were it then to see God dye?
> It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,
> It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke.

> Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
> And turne all spheares at once, peirc'd with those holes?
> Could I behold that endlesse height which is
> Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
> Humbled below us? or that blood which is
> The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
> Made durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne
> By God, for his apparell, rag'd, and torne?
> If on these things I durst not looke, durst I
> Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
> Who was Gods partner here, and furnished thus
> Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us?
> Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
> They'are present yet unto my memory,
> For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards mee,
> O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
> I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
> Corrections, till my mercies bid thee leave.
> O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.

The invention of the poem is not the figure that Donne spends the first eight lines establishing and elaborating; those lines serve merely as the first reason Donne gives for traveling westward on Good Friday. By the end of the poem he will have given two more reasons: he could not bear what he would see were he to look eastward; he faces west so as to receive corrections. C.Q. Drummond believes that, although the three reasons he gives are mutually exclusive, we should give Donne the benefit of the doubt and believe the last one:

> For one reason, simply because it is the last. Secondly, we believe it because of the passionate and compelling quality of the prayer which it comprises. Third, we believe it because it is the one reason that undergoes development and involves a turning to face the East. Fourth, we believe it because of the 'but' in the line 'I turn my back to thee, but to receive / Corrections'; which means 'for the purpose alone' or 'for no other reason than'; Donne is then insisting that this last is the only true reason. (16)

I think this is the best possible defence not only of the third of Donne's reasons but of the poem as a whole. But I think we should not be willing to believe this last reason; and I think that, despite the many beauties of this poem, we must accuse Donne of writing it, not out of the desire to understand his soul and its standing with God that motivated the best of his Holy Sonnets, but from a wish to exercise his wit on an occasion that naturally lent itself to a religious poem. I think that the first reason given in the poem, elaborated into a cosmological metaphor though it is, is obviously the only real one, and that Donne, not content with the truth, adds lines eleven through forty-two in an attempt not even to justify himself but to enjoy his own intellectual and poetic virtuosity.

Whether or not "Donne composed this poem during the journey from Polesworth to Montgomery on 3 April--Good Friday--1613" (Smith 653n.), the basis of the poem is the claim that he is riding--not walking, and this is an important difference--westward on a day when, first of all, he shouldn't be riding, and when, secondly, his "Soules form" is intent on the East. My question is a simple one: are we willing to believe that Donne got on his horse and rode westward because the things he would "see" in the East--the spectacle of Christ's suffering that, in any case, his imagination presents him though he faces the wrong way--would be too much for him to bear? Or that he rode his horse westward so that God would be able more easily to "Burne off [Donne's] rusts"? I must answer: of course not. Only a man pathologically sensitive to the

suggestive power of his own metaphors would do either of these things. The first reason Donne gives is obviously the true one: he rides westward on business or for pleasure. What then are we to make of the rest of the poem?

Here the issue of reverence is an important one. Donne's description in the poem of Christ's suffering and the effect His death had on nature is magnificent; and, as Drummond says, the prayer in which the final reason is couched is "passionate and compelling"--and reverent. Many of the details of the poem, then, encourage us to believe Donne to be sincere in his search for a true reason for his action. But he is not sincere; and I want to suggest that this poem is not as a whole a reverent one, either. It does contain some of the acute psychological observation we expect from Donne--"Pleasure or businesse, so, our Soules admit / For their first mover, and are whirld by it" is a brilliant account of what happens to a person who becomes "unbalanced" in his need to work or his search for pleasure, for example--and I have already praised the description of Christ's passion and the sincerely moving conclusion. But through much of the poem, Donne plays fast and loose with the truth, and does so for rhetorical effect. Why, for example, does he say "almost" in "Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see / That spectacle"? For two reasons: because at this point in the poem (and my argument assumes that, although Donne undoubtedly revised the poem, he was obviously not concerned in his revisions with excising contradictions or inconsistencies) he is experimenting with options, trying to discover what evidence he can

give for his reasons, and unaware that the passage that follows will convince the reader that he does in fact see the spectacle he fears to see: he is equivocating; and because as always he needs to balance what he wants with what he should want, and as a Christian he should probably want to "see" Christ's salvatory act. And why does he begin his evocative description of the passion with a falsehood: "Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye; / What a death were it then to see God dye?"? As Donne knows very well from his Bible, those who actually saw Christ die did not die themselves. But it is the proposition that introduces his meditative description, and thus is included even though false. And finally, as Drummond points out, despite his protestations to the contrary, "Donne is looking to the East anyway. He has turned his memory, part of his soul, face to face with the Saviour even before the Saviour restores his image" (16). The poem, then, is built on false assertions, rhetorical flash, and excessive ingenuity.

I have been harsh in my criticisms of "Goodfriday" because Donne is capable of such honest and beauty in those poems in which he concerns himself with the truth that a poem like this must disappoint with its wasted potential, and the author's. About the very beautiful and moving last four lines--

> O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face

--I must say this: they are irreparably harmed by their context, by the dishonest poem that they conclude. They deserve a poem that

will introduce the prayer they compose with proper reverence; "Goodfriday" is not that poem.

"A Hymne to God the Father" belongs with "Thou hast made me," "This is my playes last scene," and "Oh, to vex me" in subject and in excellence.

I.

Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begunne,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sinne; through which I runne,
And do run still: though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For, I have more.

II.

Wilt thou forgive that sinne which I have wonne
Others to sinne? and, made my sinne their doore?
Wilt thou forgive that sinne which I did shunne
A yeare, or two: but wallowed in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

III.

I have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne
My last thred, I shall perish on the shore;
But sweare by thy selfe, that at my death thy sonne
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, Thou haste done,
I feare no more.

In this poem Donne names, though not explicitly, five sins for which he asks God's forgiveness. Many commentators on the poem attempt to define precisely each of the sins--so Helen Gardner, for example, glosses the first two lines of the second stanza by saying "The sin here is possibly the writing of licentious poetry" (110n.). Possibly it is, but if that were important to the kind of poem Donne wanted to write he would have made that clear himself. Though not all of us write licentious poetry, we all risk

in our own sins, whatever they may be, encouraging others to sin as well: the lines Donne writes are both personal and universal. Gardner errs more seriously, I believe, when arguing for one particular reading of the text of the poem she prints, which is "based on 1633, but emended from the MSS" (109). The text I have taken from Grierson gives lines three and four as

> Wilt thou forgive that sinne; through which I runne,
> And do run still: though still I do deplore?

But Gardner, though using the same version as her copy-text, prints the lines as

> Wilt thou forgive those sinnes through which I runne,
> And doe them still: though still I doe deplore?

--which is the manuscript reading. Her argument for borrowing this reading from a text she believes inaccurate in other respects is this:

> The singular of 1633, 'that sinne', looks like a correction made to bring this petition into line with the others, which has led to the further correction in the next line of 'doe them still' to 'do run still'. It is impossible that Donne, in speaking of his daily sins, should limit them to one. (110n)

I must say that this seems a little high-handed of Gardner. While it is of course part of an editor's business to justify her emendations, I do not believe that Gardner's "It is impossible" is sufficient justification; she has first accepted the manuscript reading, interpreted on the basis of that reading "those sinnes" as "his daily sins," and thus eliminated the reading of 1633 because it doesn't accord with her interpretation of the manuscript reading. Had Donne wanted in these lines to repudiate

his daily sins he would have done so-- even "those sinnes" is carefully unspecific--but he did not. And in forbidding the 1633 reading Gardner prefers a manifestly inferior phrase--"And doe them still"--to "And do run still," which, with its ascending stresses, emphasizes both Donne's brilliant choice of "runne" as the verb to describe how he performs this sin and the strongly self-condemnatory "still," which means "up to this time" but also "constantly" or "habitually," making even more pointed the "still" in "though still I do deplore." I mean not to argue for one text or the other as definitively Donne's, but only to point out that Gardner is not necessarily correct in her arguments or her procedure for determining readings; and she risks misconstruing Donne in her attempt.

The two sins that are fairly specific in the poem are the first--"that sinne where I begunne, / Which was my sin, though it were done before" is pretty clearly original sin--and the last: "I have a sinne of feare" names the greatest sin, despair. The other three, though, are types of sin, and, as I have said, are both personal and general. And that is one mark of the poem's style: it is the plain style that most easily allows a poet to speak both of himself and of the generality of mankind, because its diction, its rhythms, and the clear structure with which it is usually associated invite the reader to include himself both intellectually and emotionally in the poet's situation. One feature of this poem, plain though it is, that makes it John Donne's poem is, of course, the happy coincidence of his name with

the past perfect form of the verb "to do." It is this coincidence that makes the refrain--"When thou hast done, thou hast not done"--so personal; but the refrain makes good sense even without the coincidence.

In fact, most of the poem consists of refrains and repetitions. Donne organizes each of the poem's first two stanzas as two requests for forgiveness followed by the refrain that both introduces the next stanza and emphasizes Donne's contrition (Even if you forgive these sins, you are not through / you don't have me yet, "For I have more"). I'm not sure that we can say that each of these four sins is worse than its predecessor, though Donne's language makes that progression seem possible at least: he begins with original sin (which he acknowledges to be his own--"Which was my sin," he says, the metre emphasizing the "was" so as to leave no doubt of his acceptance of culpability), proceeds through a sin that he persists in though he deplores it and a sin that encourages others in sin, and ends by asking forgiveness for "that sinne which I did shunne / A yeare, or two: but wallowed in, a score." Here the metre and language emphasize the poet's feeble attempt to resist a sin and his eventual return to it: "A yeare, or two" he shunned the sin, he says, as though the duration of his resistance is ultimately unimportant, because when he returned to the sin he "wallowed" in it, and for twenty years at that. OED cites Johnson's definition of "wallow"--"to live in any state of filth or gross vice"--and adds "to take delight in gross pleasures or a demoralizing way of life" as a

definition of the figurative sense of the word that is most often used to refer to pigs; Donne's diction here, and the metre that gives the line's strongest stress to the first syllable of "wallowed," leaves little doubt that his inconstancy in "shunning" sin strikes him (as it did in "Oh, to vex me") as the greatest of the four sins he's so far listed.

However, for the third stanza Donne reserves his greatest sin. For this sin he doesn't explicitly ask "Wilt thou forgive?" as he did with each of the others; rather, he uses the refrain to set his confession of this sin apart from the previous ones. "For I have more," the second stanza ends, and the third begins simply "I have a sinne of feare," the repeated "I have" stressing his acceptance of responsibility for this worst sin, which is his despair of salvation. Having stated the sin, Donne turns to God with "But," which both works as the adversative conjunction and has the sense "only"--"this is all You must do"-- and makes a more elaborate plea for forgiveness than he did for any of the other sins: "But sweare by thy selfe, that at my death thy sonne / Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore." This goes beyond the simple "Wilt thou forgive," and that Donne audaciously demands a vow from God might seem overreaching; but I think the poem's language and rhythm support the strong but controlled emotion (partially evoked in the anapest of "sweare by thy selfe") of the last stanza: a simple "Wilt thou forgive" is not enough to assuage Donne's "sinne of feare." And the refrain of this stanza manages to negotiate a path halfway between the apparent certainty of the

conclusion of "This is my playes last scene"--"thus purg'd of evill"--and the uncertainty of the conditional "may" in the couplet of "Thou hast made me": "Thy Grace may wing me . . ." The "And, having done that, Thou hast done," especially given the play on the poet's name, makes this a moving conclusion; but it is still part of the "But" clause: "But, if you will swear by your self . . . then thou hast done / Donne." The careful negotiation of this path allows for both certainty and humility; and it thus strikes exactly the right tone for the end of this poem, the tone of which as a whole I would categorize as dignified abasement. Donne can accuse himself in the strongest terms of doing that which he knows is wrong--he runs through sins that he deplores, he wins others to sin, he wallows in sin--but he does so in a style that allows him yet to retain his dignity as a creature of God, who can, if his confession (which requires, to be a true confession, an understanding of his sins, which he here demonstrates) and contrition (the poem itself is his act of contrition) are proper, be forgiven. I believe this is Donne's greatest religious poem, and it is great in the same way that Caelica XCIX and "Church-monuments" are great.

My argument in this chapter is hardly original; readers have complained for hundreds of years about Donne's lack of reverence in poems that seems to require reverence (starting with Ben Jonson, who thought "That Donne's Anniversary was profane and full of blasphemies" [462]). My claim, though, is that Donne did discover the proper style for writing to and about God, and that

in those poems where he uses that style--which is essentially plain, but which owes in its rhythmic grace and occasionally in its diction to the sweet--he is among the greatest writers of religious poetry. In "Thou hast made me," "This is my playes last scene," "Oh, to vex me," and "A Hymn to God the Father" Donne's style allows him, as Greville's and Herbert's style in their best poems allowed them, to condemn his sins without condemning the intellect that recognizes them or the poetic talent that can examine them; and, like Greville and Herbert, Donne uses his best poems as a medium through which he may understand the workings of God's grace on his soul. The understanding he attains in "A Hymn to God the Father" is more than an expression, it is an actual condition, of his salvation.

Notes

1 See Leonard Forster, esp. 56-57, for a good discussion of this point.

2 Even if the antecedent of "there" is, as I suppose it must be, "At the round earths imagin'd corners," Donne's opposition is, I believe, obscure.

Afterword

One need not, I am sure, be a great poet in order to attain salvation. In fact, it may be the case that great poets who are also Christians will on occasion curse their intelligence and talents: true humility, I imagine, must be difficult for a genius to practice. But Greville, Herbert, and Donne, in a few poems each, have done what an illiterate Christian could not: they have made their understanding of the conditions necessary for salvation, and their sense of having been saved, into great art.

I am wary of speculating about God's perception of the degree of humility and pride represented by great religious poetry. In this respect I am more reticent than, for example, A.D. Nuttall, who, while chiding Herbert for writing lines supposedly spoken by God, himself attempts to guess at God's likely response to "the creature Herbert." And yet, because I lay great emphasis on the creation through style of what I call the proper degree of humility, I cannot altogether abjure such speculation. In the great religious poems of my three poets, art is used to hide art or even to abase art. The plain style, which in its very plainness suggests that its practitioner is honest, is of course not innocent of its own implicit rhetorical claims. "More matter with less art," Gertrude demands of Polonius, to which he promises "I will

use no art": the plain delivery of truth takes precedence here over "art," or embellishment, just as the plain style's avoidance of ornament seems to claim a corresponding emphasis on "matter." But can a poem, no matter how plain its style, ever attain to perfect humility? Or if it does, can it be a great poem? The answer to both questions is, I think, yes.

Greville's manner of attaining humility in great poetry is dependent upon the creation through his style of the feeling appropriate to his matter. As I have suggested, Greville's achievement is the creation of a tone of dignified abasement: he hates his sins, but he has the intelligence to recognize them, the sensitivity to feel their wrongness, and the talent to convey his understanding in poetry. Herbert, in those poems in which he fully acknowledges his sinfulness, employs a similar style to depict the difficulty of bringing his will into "consent" with God's, and makes the difficulty tangible through the details of that style. And Donne, in his return to the native plain style in his "Hymn to God the Father," seems finally to be truly humble in his profound conviction of his own sin and of God's unquestionable power to save even so great a sinner as he claims to be. These poets, then, show true humility in and through their great poems: their intelligence and poetic skill enable them to transcend their pride.

The implications of my claims about style are far-reaching. Here, though, I have said nothing that is not borne out in the poets' own practice, and that is not implicit in their own seriousness. A great poet means what he says, and wants his

readers to understand, as fully as their own intelligences will allow them to understand, that meaning; and his seriousness is embodied and conveyed in his style. Each of my poets would want of their readers what Ben Jonson wanted of the readers of his collection of Epigrams:

> Pray thee, take care, that tak'st my book in hand,
> To read it well: that is, to understand.

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